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ABSTRACT

This report compares results from 1996 national study of the current attitudes of American teenagers with similar 1974 and 1983 surveys. Almost 1,000 students between 13 and 17 years from households representative of the national population in geographic distribution, population density, household size, age of household head, and family income participated. Males and females were equally represented. Findings are presented on adolescents' attitudes in four major areas. "Students and Their Schools" presents overall marks for schools; and attitudes towards school personnel, grades and homework, teaching methods, discipline, gangs, drugs, coursework, and student activities such as school sports, music, academic and service clubs, and student government. "After School" covers leisure activities such as music, television, radio and movies, computer and video games, sports, and reading; work; allowances and spending money; community service and non-school organizations; and alcohol and drug use. "The Homefront" addresses attitudes toward parent relationships, family communication, rules and regulations, domestic violence, and parent drug use. "The Big Picture" covers attitudes toward national and world problems; politics and government; the 1996 Presidential election; religious practices; heroes; and views on contemporary issues such as families and children, sexual issues, role of government, social and moral issues, crime, justice, and economic security; careers; life goals; and marriage and children. (KDFB)

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The Mood of American Youth

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The Mood of American Youth
1996

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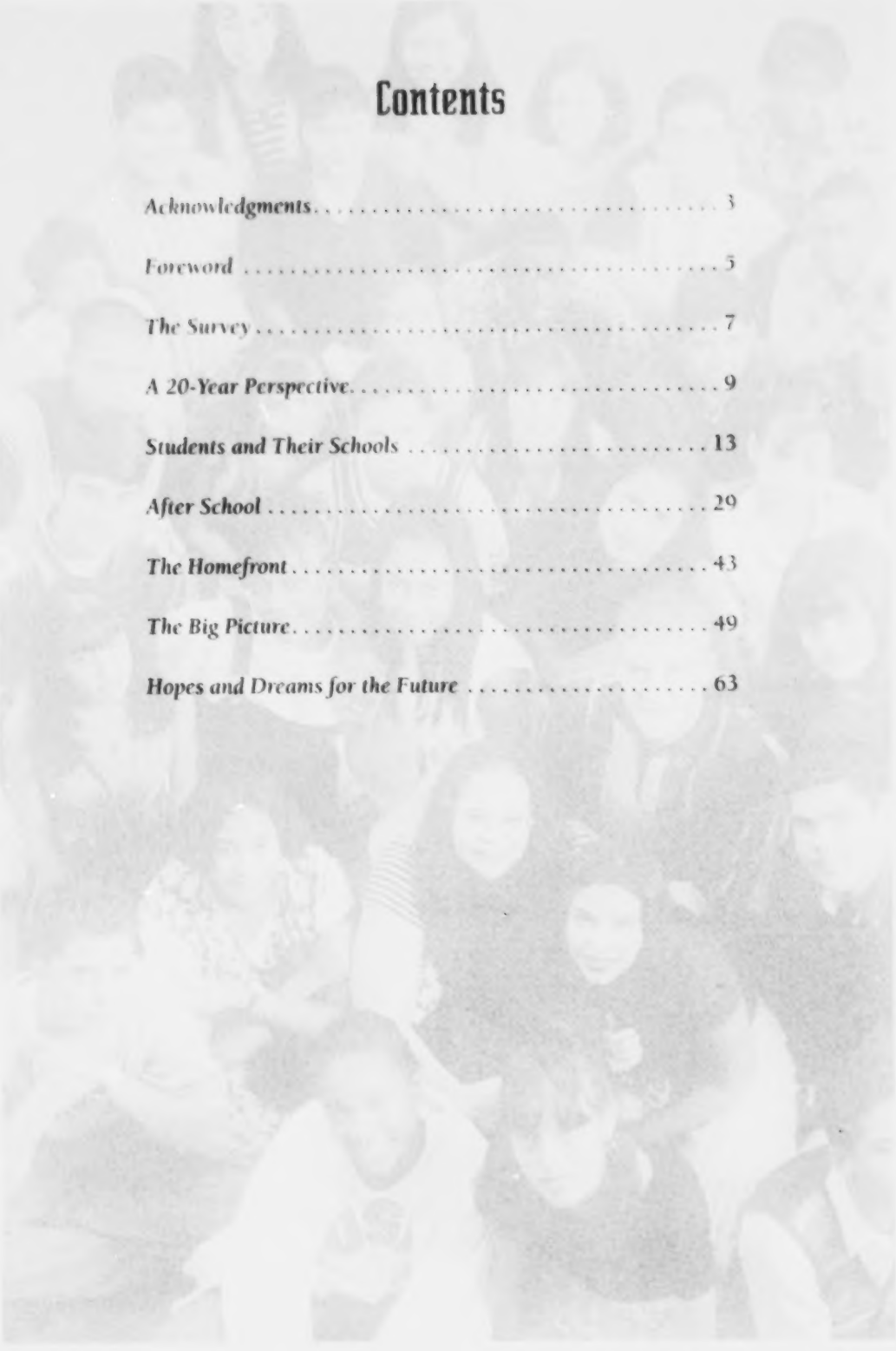

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Acknowledgments

This country's greatest resource is its young people. It is a commonly heard adage — an overworked, stale phrase that is nonetheless completely true.

The wealth of any nation, any state, any community can be measured in the energy and in the lives of its children. Our futures are revealed in the unformed dreams of our young people, and our collective strength resonates in their whispered hopes.

But who is listening to discover this untold treasure of young aspirations and as yet untapped talent and capacities?

The Mood of American Youth 1996 is one such effort to capture and amplify these too often quiet voices of our young people. In undertaking this important project, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans is very proud to have partners who are committed to providing that understanding ear to children. Our thanks go to **Walter Anderson**, Editor, *Parade* magazine, for his great interest in this project. Furthermore, our deep appreciation is extended to the **Giles Foundation**, the **Marion Foundation** and the **Ford Motor Company** for their generous support of — and commitment to — this study.

And of particular note is the **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)**, whose commitment to improving the lives of young Americans in countless ways now spans the generations. It was NASSP's foresight and concern more than twenty years ago that led to the publication of the first *Mood of American Youth* in 1974 as well as the second study in 1983. This legacy has greatly enriched and fortified this current endeavor not only to *listen* to, but also to hear, the nation's youth.

The wealth of any nation, any state, any community can be measured in the energy and in the lives of children.

Foreword

For 50 years, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans has committed itself to the belief that our nation's young people have much to teach us about the unlimited power of the human spirit and the boundless beauty of the world as well as the hardships, injustices and disappointments that are too often laid in the paths of our lives.

This report, *The Mood of American Youth 1996*, represents our Association's effort to bring the lessons of these young, but nonetheless wise, "teachers" to the forefront of the nation's attention. In doing so, we are stating that what is of concern to our children must be of paramount importance to us all. The opinions of young people are not often sought and are, to an even lesser degree, heard. If we are to act intelligently and compassionately on behalf of our children's best interests, we must know their hopes and worries, habits and hobbies, their aspirations and their fears.

What is of concern to our children must be of paramount importance to us all.

A Half Century of Dedication

The Horatio Alger Association believes that its responsibility to listen to the nation's youth is firmly bonded to an obligation to also serve and assist these young adults. Since 1947, the Association has worked vigorously to support the notion that the American dream remains within the reach of all its citizens.

Named for the renowned author Horatio Alger, Jr., whose tales of beating down adversity through unyielding perseverance and basic moral principles enraptured the public in the late 19th century, the Association provides young Americans with role models who have triumphed over early obstacles to reach a level of exemplary achievement while maintaining the highest levels of integrity and ethical standards. These role models, the members of the Association, work to directly provide promising young people with the support, education and confidence needed to realize their dreams of success.

The Association is proud to sponsor one of the nation's largest college financial aid programs, the *Horatio Alger National Scholars Program* awards almost $1 million in scholarships each year. The National Scholars program is the only major scholarship effort which specifically assists high school students who have faced and overcome great obstacles in their young lives.

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Support for the Study

Clearly, our Association is not alone in its interest in and commitment to young people. Our partner in this project, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), has been for many years a leader in improving the educational lives of children across the country. NASSP was the originator of the *Mood of American Youth* studies, sponsoring both the 1974 and 1983 research surveys and reports. This legacy has greatly enriched and strengthened the 1996 study.

Furthermore, the Horatio Alger Association is deeply grateful for the resolve and support of the Giles Foundation, the Ford Motor Corporation and the Marion Foundation on behalf of this important project. These organizations also share our faith in the insights and wisdom to be found among the nation's young people.

As this country hurtles toward the next century, seemingly with incomprehensible speed, it is the Horatio Alger Association's hope that we pause — if ever so briefly — to take a careful reading of our youth and in doing so, rededicate ourselves to making that fast approaching horizon a more secure and promising place for all children.

George L. Argytos
President and CEO
Horatio Alger Association

The Survey

The Mood of American Youth is a comprehensive study of the current attitudes of American teenagers and is one of the few studies that can compare the opinions expressed by today's youth with those of their counterparts from earlier decades. Based on an extensive survey of almost 1,000 students between the ages of 13 and 17 conducted in early 1996, this report also compares the attitudes of today's young people with those of their 1974 and 1983 counterparts. *The Mood of American Youth* surveys conducted during these earlier decades serve as the basis for examining differences and similarities among students over a 23-year time frame.

This survey, conducted by NFO Research, Inc., questioned students selected from households that are representative of the national population in geographic distribution, population density, household size, age of household head and family income. Quotas were established to ensure an appropriate representation of male and female respondents.

A total of 86% of the students responding to the survey were enrolled in public schools. Ten percent of the students attended private schools, and 3% took part in other schooling options.

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A 20-Year Perspective

Microwave ovens were not a fixture of every kitchen counter, and the microprocessor that was destined to define, and then redefine, virtually every aspect of American life was still the tiny province of scientists and engineers.

A string of formerly grand, industrialized giants like Cleveland and Gary, Indiana, became known as the Rust Belt, and catch terms like "urban renewal" were bantered about to describe what all cities needed. Legalized gambling was just under way in Atlantic City. McDonalds was still posting and updating the number of millions of hamburgers sold on its signs out front.

One of the country's most traumatic wars was thankfully, but so painfully, winding down — just as a political scandal would shake, but not break, the foundation of our democratic government.

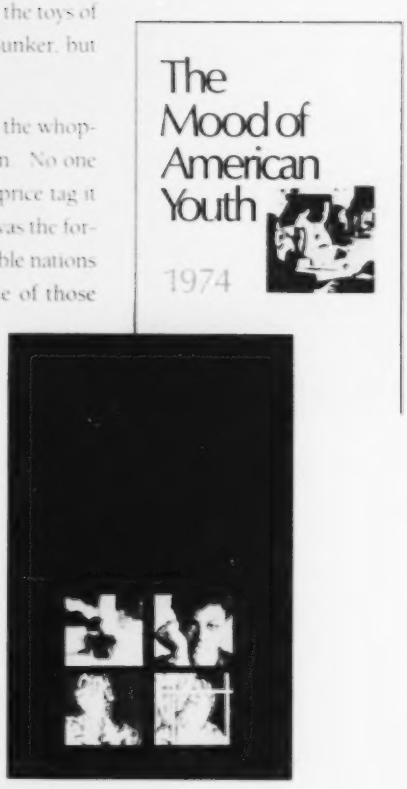
We didn't have CDs or VCRs, even cable television was only in its infancy. Cellular phones and fax machines were still only the toys of James Bond and Dick Tracey. We had Archie Bunker, but no Al Bundy.

The public grew concerned by "stagflation," and the whopping U.S. public debt had soared to $533 billion. No one would have imagined the staggering $4 trillion price tag it would become in less than 20 years. "Detente" was the foreign policy watchword for the two most formidable nations on earth. Who could have predicted that one of those superpowers and its constellation of communism would collapse a mere 16 years later?

The counterculture was fading, and the so-called "me generation" emerged and began substituting law degrees for flower power and trading in Dylan for disco.

It was 1974.

That year, the first *Mood of American Youth* survey revealed a teenage generation seemingly grown weary of the rebellious ways that had characterized young adults only five years earlier. Pundits speculated this would be another *quiet* generation, much like that of the



1950s. "Normalcy" was returning to the youngsters, and undoubtedly parents everywhere breathed some huge sighs of relief. The "new morality" turned out not to be so new after all — at least among teens of the time.

In retrospect, and as the 1983 and 1996 *Mood of American Youth* surveys would bear out, these teens were really not quite the complacent, return to traditionalism bunch we thought at the time. We focused on the 54% who viewed the American government as "just about right" and declared the tide had turned in terms of student unrest. And it had. Nevertheless, almost 40% were still saying the government needed "considerable change." A majority of students in 1974 reported positive relationships with their parents, and we concluded the once vast generation gap was narrowing. And it was. But still half of the students said they found it difficult to discuss personal issues with their parents, and more than 40% reported they would be happier living away from home.

A majority of students in 1974 reported positive relationships with their parents and we concluded the once vast generation gap was narrowing.

Yes, in comparison to what had *preceded* them, the teens of 1974 were much different. They were focused on school and careers, showing little of the activism and loud protests of the 1960s. But true perspective comes with not only knowing what came *before*, but also being able to assess what came *after*.

From the vantage point of 1996, perhaps it is more accurate to view the change among youth from the 1960s to the '70s as a kind of cultural "correction," much in the same way Wall Street rights itself after a period of extreme boom or bust. However, that alignment would go much further in the decades ahead.

The 1980s bounded in peppered with news of mergers, junk bonds and insider trading. Unemployment soared to 10% in the early part of the decade. Central America, Grenada and the Middle East replaced Vietnam and Cambodia in the headlines. U.S. education was termed a "rising tide of mediocrity," and an apparently endless call for school reform began. The Statue of Liberty got a facelift and the stock market took a big dive. The Equal Rights Amendment which had passed Congress in 1972 lapsed without gaining state ratification in 1982. The mysterious, deadly virus was given a name and would rapidly blaze a terrifying path of destruction through our collective lives. New age music and the beginnings of rap blared onto the cultural scene in a new format — music videos had arrived, and so had the MTV generation.

That generation, as the 1983 *Mood of American Youth* survey reported, had moved even closer in identification with rock-solid careers, home and family life. The parent-teen conflicts over curfews and choice of friends remained, but these disputes would be aired and resolved most often in the family living room; school campuses were no longer the open forum for

youth dissent. Home computers had arrived, and the new technology was the top career choice among teens. We dubbed them students of the "Information Age" but completely underestimated the magnitude of the phenomenon. If teens of the 80s were *attuned* to their high-tech world, the next decade ushered in youth that were direct access *products* of that information revolution.

By the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina followed Desert Storm on the front pages of the newspapers. But by then, the students were not reading them. In 1974, the vast majority of teens said they read a newspaper *daily*. In 1983, about 85% of students reported reading a daily newspaper at least *once a week*. Today, only two thirds of the students make such a claim. Television, radio and the Internet claim much more of their attention. Modems, faxes, pagers, call-waiting, call-forwarding, E-mail, Direct TV, Home Box Office and pay-per-view make these teens the offspring of instant-access everything. This plugged-in generation is not so much tuned-in as it is overloaded.

And as the saying goes, there is good news and then there is bad news in this scenario for teens of the 90s. On one hand, today's teens place a premium on their educations. More are aspiring to college degrees than ever before and unfortunately, more are also finding this a financial hurdle that is often insurmountable. The teens' views on what makes for a satisfying life appear more balanced; they recognize that financial and career success will be empty rewards without the comfort and security of caring families and friends. The median ideal age for marriage has increased. The 70s students thought 21 was about right; the 90s teens believe waiting until their mid-twenties is more appropriate. Furthermore, these young people seem aware of the difficulties which lie ahead in becoming parents too soon; they say they recognize they are not ready to join the legions of teenage parents who have preceded them. Whether they will act on this knowledge remains to be seen.

The teenage girls of the 90s also appear to have reaped the rewards of pioneers for women's rights. Girls today are as likely as boys to rate math and science as important courses of study, and it appears more and more girls are turning their interests to careers in these fields. The females of the 1974 study projected vast disparities between their earning power and that of men. Today, the salary gap projections are down to only about 11%.

Some areas of change over the decades seem constant. Overpopulation and the environment were the top world concerns among 1974 students. The threat of World War III and nuclear disaster replaced these issues in the 1983 survey. Thankfully, those particular dangers hardly register in the minds of teens today. Unfortunately, other horrors have stepped in to take their place.

Now, crime and violence have risen to the top of student worries. There always seem to be clouds of doubt and fear among our children.

But perhaps the most troublesome finding in comparing the three decades of research on teen opinions is the marked decline in what was once the staple of youth — the outlook that the world would always be a better place for them. Today's teens are not sure that they will be better off than their parents. They are no more confident in our nation's government than they were at the height of the Watergate scandal. Unlike the 70s survey, when a majority of students still believed that anyone could be elected president, the 1996 students see vast wealth as a prerequisite to that office. When asked to name a personal hero, the most frequent response among the 1996 students was "no one." Their faith in the American dream is badly shaken; almost two thirds of the students now agree that such a dream is no longer possible for most citizens.

When asked to name a personal hero, the most frequent response among the 1996 students was "no one."

Perspective is a powerful tool. As we look carefully at the waves of change that sweep by — and sometimes over — us with time, we should review not just the transitory nature of headlines and hemlines. They will fluctuate at every turn of the calendar. We also must be careful not to measure our children's well-being solely by how closely they resemble our lives and attitudes. While we must be reassured by witnessing in today's young people a balance of idealism and practicality and a seemingly solid foundation of values, respect, ambition and reflection, we also must assess and then vigorously preserve, protect and, if necessary, restore their most powerful ally of all — hope.

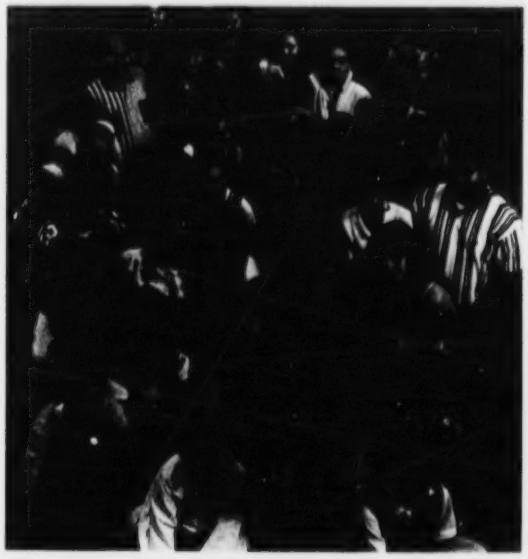
Janis L. Cromer is an educational analyst with the Horatio Alger Association and is the author of both the 1974 and 1983 Mood of American Youth *reports.*

Students and Their Schools

Schools Get Acceptable Marks, but Have Room for Improvement

School plays a very big role in the lives of teenagers. During most of the year, students can easily spend more of their waking hours at school than anywhere else, including their home. So, how do today's students feel about their schools?

Although most students give their schools good overall marks, their level of satisfaction appears to have declined over the last two decades. When asked to grade their school's performance, approximately two thirds (66%) of today's students gave their schools a "grade" of *B* or better. By comparison, 75% of students surveyed in 1983 gave their schools a similar rating and 77% of 1974 students indicated their schools were "doing a good job." This decline in students' perceptions of their schools seems to mirror adult opinions about diminishing school quality noted in numerous articles and surveys throughout recent years.



Based on a scale of four points, with a rating of 3.5 to 4.0 equal to an *A*, the overall average grade for American schools was 2.8—a *B*. Fewer than 8% of the students graded their schools a *D* or *F*. Students who attend private schools rated their schools significantly higher than public school students. In addition, those students from households earning $50,000 or more per year had higher perceptions of their schools' quality than those with lower income.

Students base their ratings of their schools on a variety of aspects beyond academic considerations. When asked why they liked school, students are much more likely to say "friends" than any other aspect. "Classes" and "learning" rank fourth and seventh, respectively, after "friends," "sports" and "social activities." Boys tend to like school for "sports" more often than girls, while girls express a higher interest in "social activities," "classes" and "preparing for college."

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Students who give their schools As and Bs think positively about their schools in general. They believe their schools provide courses relevant to their future, offer opportunity for open discussion and provide sufficient personal attention; these students report only a moderate level of discipline problems. Conversely, those who evaluate their schools with a grade of C or below report a lack of interesting and relevant classes, little personalized instruction and more discipline problems.

REASONS FOR LIKING SCHOOL

Reasons	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Friends	87.2	86.4	87.8
2. Sports	51.9	58.0	46.0
3. Social activities	47.2	40.3	54.0
4. Classes	43.1	38.1	47.7
5. Cocurricular activities	41.4	38.3	44.1
6. Teachers	40.2	37.6	42.4
7. Learning	38.3	37.0	39.5
8. Preparing for college	35.5	30.4	40.3
9. Preparing for a job	26.5	27.6	25.5

The Teachers

Student assessments of what makes a good teacher appear to have shifted somewhat since 1983. While "explaining things clearly," "spending time to help students" and "having a sense of humor" were the three top considerations in 1983, teachers' "knowledge of their subjects" ranked seventh on their list. Students now appear to see teacher knowledge of subject area content as a more important characteristic, ranking third after "having a sense of humor" and "makes the class interesting."

Approximately two thirds of students believe that good teachers "explain things clearly" and "spend time to help students." Other important characteristics mentioned by at least half of students include "being fair to their students," "treating students like adults," "relating well to students" and "being considerate of students' feelings." Least important among the attributes was giving interesting assignments.

Girls were more likely than boys to state that "best" teachers "explain things clearly," "spend time helping students" and "are considerate of students' feelings." However, ideas about what constitutes a "best teacher" vary remarkably little between students who attend public school and those who attend private school. Regardless of their age, their families' income or the part of the country in which they live, students ascribe the same characteristics to their best teachers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BEST TEACHERS

Characteristics	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Have a sense of humor	79.2	78.3	80.0
2. Make the class interesting	73.7	72.0	75.2
3. Have knowledge of their subjects	70.1	67.8	72.1
4. Explain things clearly	66.2	61.1	71.0
5. Spend time to help students	65.8	62.4	68.9
6. Are fair to their students	61.8	59.3	64.1
7. Treat students like adults	54.4	52.7	55.7
8. Relate well to students	54.2	54.3	53.8
9. Are considerate of students' feelings	51.9	46.8	56.5
10. Don't show favoritism toward students	46.6	44.2	48.7
11. Give interesting assignments	38.2	35.0	40.8

The most frequently mentioned characteristic of "worst" teachers was that they "are dull and boring."

Students report that their "worst" teachers are almost mirror images of their best ones. The most frequently mentioned characteristic of "worst" teachers was that they "are dull and boring." These teachers also "don't explain things clearly," "show favoritism toward students," "have a poor attitude" and "expect too much from students." Clearly, attitude is more important than class content in defining a "worst" teacher; only two in ten students criticize their "worst" teachers for not knowing their subject area.

Boys and girls differ somewhat in their intensity of views regarding what characterizes a "worst" teacher. Girls were more likely to criticize teachers for "showing favoritism toward students" and "not giving help/individual attention." Overall, comments regarding "best" and "worst" teachers show girls expressing more concerns than boys regarding how helpful and considerate their teachers are.

Public school students are more likely than private school students to complain about "worst" teachers "having a poor attitude," "being too strict" or "not giving help/individual attention." These complaints could be related to the larger class sizes and greater discipline needs that may occur in public schools.

From the students' perspective, a teacher's attitude toward students and presentation style are as important as class content. These findings suggest that teachers need the ability to build rapport, develop mutual respect and effectively communicate with students in order to convey their subject matter. The importance of humor and interesting presentation suggests that effective speaking skills should be an important aspect of teacher development and training.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WORST TEACHERS

Characteristics	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Are dull/have a boring class	79.6	77.2	81.9
2. Don't explain things clearly	63.2	61.9	64.3
3. Show favoritism toward students	52.7	47.9	56.9
4. Have a poor attitude	49.8	46.6	52.7
5. Expect too much from students	49.1	46.8	51.1
6. Don't relate to students	46.2	45.1	47.1
7. Give too much homework	44.2	44.9	43.5
8. Are too strict	40.6	41.6	39.5
9. Don't give help/individual attention	40.5	36.8	43.7
10. Lack control	39.9	38.7	41.0
11. Lack consistency	32.6	33.7	31.5
12. Have an unfair grading system	31.1	28.0	33.6
13. Don't know subject area	21.0	20.6	21.0

Overall, students generally have faith that their teachers are interested in them and their concerns; 70% say that teachers are "always interested" or "usually interested" in their students and their concerns. While a similar proportion (70%) believe that teachers are accessible to discuss their issues and concerns, only 57% of students think that teachers show an understanding of these problems and concerns.

Those students who rated the overall quality of their school *A* or *B* were more likely to rate their teachers as being interested, understanding and accessible than those who rated their school *C* or lower.

Grades and Homework

As in 1974 and 1983, grading systems appear to be a minor issue for students in 1996. Eight in ten students claim they are satisfied with their schools' grading system; this is even higher than reported in 1983. Furthermore, "unfair grading" ranked only 12th among the traits of "worst" teachers.

Homework continues to receive much interest among educators, parents and students. Recent studies indicate a strong positive correlation between amount of homework and success indicators such as grades, test scores and college achievement. Critics of education in the United States also point out that the average amount of homework assigned in the United States is dramatically lower than in Europe and Japan.

However, in this survey, student self-reports of their study habits show that two thirds spend seven hours or less per week on homework while a quarter spend two hours or less. On average, students report 5.86 hours of homework per week—only 51 minutes a day, including weekends. This is even lower than the 1 hour 10 minutes per day reported in 1983.

Students' perceptions of their schools' quality appear highly related to amount of time spent on homework. Students who rate their schools high (*A* or *B*) reported doing an average of 1 hour and 30 minutes more per week than those who rated their schools *C*, and an average of 2 hours 20 minutes more than those who rated their schools *D* or *F*. Interestingly, criticism of the amount of homework required did not vary much among these same groups. It appears that either the students who put more effort into homework like their schools better or the better schools demand more from their students in terms of homework.

Girls spend, on average, nearly 1 hour and 30 minutes more per week on homework than boys. Average study times also varied significantly for other groups, with older teens studying more than younger teens, private school students more than public, those studying a college prep curriculum more than those studying a technical/vocational curriculum.

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The Classroom

In 1974 and 1983, "more discussion" was the top-ranked suggestion for improving teaching methods. The need for "more exciting and interesting classes" was also frequently noted in 1983.

The discussion approach to teaching appears to be in wide use today, with nearly seven in ten students agreeing that their "classes offer opportunity for open discussion." Discussion continues to be an important factor in students' evaluation of educational quality; students who rate their schools *A* or *B* are more likely to agree that they have opportunity for discussion than other students.

Over three quarters of students continue to see a need for "more exciting and interesting classes." This need is expressed most strongly among those students who rated their schools *C* or below. However, this cry for "more exciting and interesting" does not mean that today's classroom lacks "relevance" to the world. Eight in ten students believe that their school "has courses that teach things I can use after graduating." Again, students who gave their schools above average marks report higher agreement than others.

Most students agree that "teachers offer enough individualized instruction," and nearly two thirds agree that they, themselves, receive the personal attention they need. Again a strong relationship exists between individual

instruction and school ratings, those in *A* or *B* rated schools are significantly more likely to agree to both statements than others. Only 30% of those who rated their schools *D* or *F* felt that they received enough personal attention.

Discipline, Gangs and Drugs

"Lack of discipline" is commonly considered one of the biggest problems confronting public schools and is also considered a serious deterrent to effective teaching. In more recent years, the growth of gang activities and drug usage by children have become important concerns for students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community at large.

When asked to rate 16 different subjects on their importance, students chose math as the top subject.

Students also consider discipline a problem. Forty-five percent of students surveyed agree strongly or somewhat that "discipline is a very serious problem in my school." On the other hand, an equal number of students complain that "my school's rules on student conduct are too strict."

Students' perceptions of the discipline problem appear related to their overall ratings of their schools. Those who rated their schools *A* or *B* were less likely than others to agree that discipline is a serious problem. Public school students were more likely to perceive discipline as a problem than those who attend private schools.

Interestingly, while those students who rated their schools *C* or below are most likely to perceive discipline as a problem, they are also most likely to complain that school rules on conduct are too strict. The dual, seemingly at odds, complaints of these students may be a sign of their overall unhappiness with their schools.

Over a quarter of students (27%) consider gang activity a part of their school culture. Public school students are significantly more likely to report gang activity than those in private school. Those who rated the overall performance of their schools *C* or less also report more gang activity than those in higher rated schools. This level of gang activity appears to be related to the high proportion of discipline problems reported by students who are dissatisfied with their school.

Differences in perceived level of gang activity are based on several variables. Private school students report very little gang influence in their schools. Those living in households earning less than $25,000 report gang activity in their schools more frequently than other income groups. Students in the Northeast are least likely to consider gangs a part of their school culture.

Contrary to popular opinion, it appears that gang influence is not solely the province of major metropolitan areas. Students living in medium-sized cities are as likely as those in very large metropolitan areas to consider gangs

a part of their school culture. However, those in rural areas and cities under 100,000 population are less likely to consider gangs a part of their school culture.

Only a minority of students appear to consider the use of illicit drugs as an acceptable practice; 16% agree that "trying drugs is a part of growing up." Given their greater independence and potential for exposure to questionable activities, it is not surprising that older teens are more likely than younger teens to consider drug usage acceptable (21% vs. 10%). As with discipline problems and gang activity, acceptance of drug use is especially prevalent among those students who rate the quality of their schools *D* or *F*.

Many communities have considered school uniforms as a mechanism to improve discipline, reduce wearing of "gang colors" and thereby curb violence. In fact, uniforms have been widely adopted for primary schools in many major cities across the country. Few students, however, see this action as a solution to violence; only one fifth of students agree that "mandatory school uniforms would reduce violence in my school." Importantly, there are no differences in opinion among those in the "best" schools versus the "worst" schools. In addition, over three quarters of students do not want uniforms; 77% agree that "school uniforms should not be required at my school."

Courses

In 1974 and 1983, students rated mathematics and English as the most important courses offered at their schools. According to today's students, computer usage/programming has now joined math and English as one of the "basics."

When asked to rate 16 different subjects on their importance, students chose math as the top subject. A total of 96% of the students said math was either "very important" or "fairly important." On a four-point scale, with 1.0 being "not at all important" and 4.0 being "very important," mathematics received a 3.70 rating.

Computer usage/programming classes and English classes almost tied for second place with 92% and 93% respectively considering them "very important" or "fairly important." Average ratings were 3.56 and 3.54, respectively. Clearly, computer technology has made its way into today's classroom and students understand the importance it plays in today's society. In contrast, computer education was barely a mention in the 1974 survey.

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Substantial numbers of students also recognize that science is an important subject; 86% rated the subject "very important" or "fairly important," and the average rating was 3.31.

Sex education courses ranked only ninth in importance in 1983, but their current ranking, under the expanded label of sex education/health, has increased to fifth. Teen pregnancy and the increase in HIV/AIDS cases among teens may be making sex and health education issues more relevant for today's teens.

While it is interesting to understand what courses students like and dislike, their reasons for not liking their classes are more important.

Business classes became important to students in the 1980's and remain relatively important today. Nearly 80% of students rated business/commercial classes as "very important" or "fairly important." However, among all subjects studied, business and government have suffered the greatest declines in perceived importance since 1983. These findings may be related to the multitude of negative stories regarding business and government in recent years and indicative of a continued apathetic attitude toward government.

Physical education has also dropped substantially in terms of importance. This decline might be related to an increase in the number of schools not requiring physical education classes.

As in 1974 and 1983, classes in the fine arts, such as art, music and drama, were rated among the lowest in importance of all classes studied.

Interestingly, math and computer usage/programming were rated similarly by both students studying a college prep curriculum and those studying a technical/vocational curriculum. This may indicate that students are more cognizant of the role of technology in all careers today. Not surprisingly, the more traditionally "academic" subjects such as English, science, history/social studies, government and foreign language were more important to college prep students.

Many academic subjects are considered more important by girls than by boys; as in 1983, girls gave higher ratings than boys for subjects such as English, business and foreign languages. Boys and girls rated mathematics (3.68 and 3.71), computer usage (3.54 and 3.58) and science (3.33 and 3.29) similarly in terms of importance. These ratings may point to female students' continued interest in and awareness of non-traditional career paths available to women today.

Girls continue to give higher importance ratings than boys for subjects such as sex education/health and family living/home economics. However, boys gave physical education and vocational classes higher ratings than girls did.

Interestingly, two of the courses that students consider most important are also the courses they report liking most. Computer usage/programming is

IMPORTANCE RATINGS OF COURSES

	Total Rating	Male Rating	Female Rating	% Very Important	% Fairly Important
1. Mathematics	3.70	3.68	3.71	74.5	21.4
2. Computer usage/ programming	3.56	3.54	3.58	66.6	25.1
3. English	3.54	3.39	3.68	63.2	29.3
4. Science	3.31	3.33	3.29	48.3	37.2
5. Sex education/health	3.08	2.97	3.18	36.7	40.2
6. History/social studies	3.07	3.04	3.10	37.0	39.8
7. Government	3.03	2.97	3.07	33.0	43.6
8. Business/commercial	3.02	2.93	3.11	29.6	49.0
9. Family living/home economics	2.80	2.65	2.94	23.2	43.1
10. Foreign languages	2.77	2.55	2.97	24.0	41.3
11. Vocational	2.75	3.00	2.51	22.7	39.9
12. Physical education	2.66	2.80	2.51	22.5	35.3
13. Religion	2.46	2.41	2.51	25.1	23.1
14. Art	2.36	2.31	2.40	11.0	29.5
15. Music	2.34	2.21	2.45	13.9	26.5
16. Drama	2.10	1.91	2.27	7.3	22.4

Very Important 4.0 — Not Very Important 2.0
Fairly Important 3.0 — Not At All Important 1.0

the class liked most (52% liking) and disliked least (16% disliking). Mathematics, while liked by nearly half of all students, is disliked by 31%. Similarly, science is liked more than it is disliked, 43% liking vs. 27% disliking. Girls are as equally likely as boys to report enjoying computer usage/programming, math and science — a significant departure from earlier studies showing girls often shying away from such studies.

The high ratings of math and science courses is a considerable improvement from 1983, when these courses were equally liked and disliked. Other classes ranked high in importance do not rate as well in terms of student enjoyment. For example, English ranks eighth in terms of liking (36%) but is disliked by an equal proportion (36%). Business and government courses, while considered fairly important, are disliked more than liked.

While it is interesting to understand what courses students like and dislike, their reasons for not liking their classes are more important. The top two reasons mentioned for not liking their classes were "boring material" and

COURSES LIKED AND DISLIKED

Courses	% Liking	% Disliking	Ratio Like/Dislike
1. Computer usage/programming	52.1	16.1	3.24
2. Mathematics	47.4	30.9	1.53
3. Physical education	43.7	24.9	1.76
4. Science	43.2	27.4	1.58
5. Art	42.4	20.9	2.03
6. Vocational	37.6	19.6	1.92
7. Music	35.7	24.9	1.43
8. English	35.7	35.8	1.00
9. History/social studies	35.4	34.8	1.02
10. Foreign languages	30.7	33.5	0.92
11. Family living/home economics	29.3	24.0	1.22
12. Sex education/health	24.4	23.0	1.06
13. Drama	23.6	33.2	0.71
14. Business/commercial	20.7	26.9	0.77
15. Religion	20.4	27.7	0.74
16. Government	16.6	37.7	0.44

"not interested in subject." These complaints have a familiar ring; students' number one characteristic of their "worst" teachers was "are dull/have a boring class" while "best" teachers "have a sense of humor" and "make the class interesting." One might hypothesize that poor class presentation is a major factor in disliking a class.

Nearly half of students dislike at least one class because they don't like their teacher, and four in ten complained that some classes have no practical use. Consistent with mixed abilities, students provided mixed reactions regarding the challenge provided by classes and the speed at which material is covered. More students complained that "classes move too slow" (29%) than "too fast" (20%). However, similar proportions consider classes to have "not enough challenge" as "too much challenge" (20% vs. 16%). In addition, a quarter of students think they have "too many/hard exams" and "not enough class discussion."

Those who rated their schools low in terms of performance (*D/F* rating) were more likely than others to complain about boring material, classes moving too slow and lack of challenge.

REASONS FOR NOT LIKING COURSES

Reasons	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Boring material	76.8	77.2	76.5
2. Not interested in subject	69.4	65.2	73.5
3. Dislike teacher	48.1	47.3	49.2
4. No practical use	40.3	40.7	40.1
5. Class moves too slow	28.5	27.4	29.6
6. Too many/hard exams	25.1	23.9	26.5
7. Not enough class discussion	24.5	21.7	27.3
8. Not enough challenge	19.9	20.8	19.1
9. Class moves too fast	19.7	17.9	21.6
10. Too much challenge	16.3	14.9	17.6
11. Other	21.2	23.0	19.7

Principals

In 1983, students expressed overwhelming praise for their principals and their interest and concern for students. In contrast, students today award their principals substantially lower marks.

While a majority (62%) of students believe that their principals are "always interested" or "usually interested" in their students and students' concerns, this contrasts sharply with the 90% of students who gave similar marks in 1983. Students who graded the quality of their schools an *A* or *B* gave their principals higher marks than those who graded their schools *C* or below. However, even among these students, only 67% rated their principal as "always interested" or "usually interested."

Students are even less certain that their principals understand students and their problems. Only half (51%) stated that principals "completely understand" or "usually understand" their problems and concerns. While students who awarded their schools *A*s or *B*s express greater faith in their principals than others, only 57% consider them understanding.

The youth of today are split in terms of considering their principals accessible to discuss student issues and concerns. Less than half (49%) think that their principals are "always" or "usually" available to talk with them. Accessibility, like the ratings of principals' interest and understanding, varied with students' overall estimation of their schools.

The ratings students gave their principals were consistent across age, gender and region of the country and among those who attend public and private schools.

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Just as students believe their "best" teachers are those who are able to relate well to young people, students also seem to judge their administrators on similar criteria, such as their abilities to understand and show an interest in students. Further, the overall quality of their schools appears to be partially related to how well and how much both teachers and administrators interact with students.

Guidance Counselors

Ten percent of students claim their school has no guidance counselor.

Today's students appear to have more confidence in their counselors and view them with a broader perspective than students in 1983. Students also express more confidence in their counselors than in either their teachers or their principals.

Three quarters of students view counselors as being "always" or "usually" interested in students and their concerns, understanding of those problems and concerns and accessible to discuss student issues and concerns. As with teachers and principals, student evaluations of guidance counselors' interest, understanding and accessibility are strongly related to students' overall assessment of their schools; those who give their schools a grade of *A* or *B* rate their counselors higher than those who award their schools a *C* or lower.

Ten percent of students claim their school has no guidance counselor. Among those who have a counselor, 27% of the students said they did not meet with their counselors once during the past year. Nearly six in ten (59%) met with their guidance counselor two or more times during the school year.

When students meet with their counselors, the most frequently discussed topic is the student's selection of required and elective courses. Sixty-three percent of all counselor visits are for this purpose. Other academic reasons mentioned by more than a third of students included receiving information about colleges (43%) and about college scholarships (34%).

In 1983, students viewed their school counselors primarily as class advisors, providing consultation regarding classes and college entrance. Less than 20% discussed issues regarding career planning, and less than 10% claimed to discuss personal problems. Today, the second most mentioned reason for meeting with counselors was for career planning (54%), and nearly a third (32%) of students claimed they have discussed personal problems with their school counselor.

Visiting a school counselor for disciplinary reasons has increased since 1983. Today, 19% of students claim they have visited a counselor for disciplinary reasons during the school year, while only 4% reported these issues in 1983.

Not unexpectedly, as students get older, course selections increase in number and importance and college grows nearer, the number of visits to their counselors increase. However, few other differences exist in students' utilization of their counselors when it comes to gender and region of the country and among those attending public or private schools.

Those students who have school counselors view them as "helpful" in all areas of counseling. Eighty percent or more rated their counselor "very helpful" or "fairly helpful" for counseling regarding classes, college and career issues. Nearly three quarters found their counselors helpful for counseling on personal problems.

Student Activities

School clubs, athletic teams, student government and musical groups continue to be popular among today's students. Nearly three quarters (74%) of the students surveyed reported they are involved in some form of school-related activity. However, reported involvement in school activities is down from 1983 when more than 80% reported participation.

School Sports

By far, athletic teams and clubs are the school activities that involve the largest numbers of students. More than four in ten (42%) reported involvement with their schools' athletic programs. While substantially more boys than girls report participation in school athletics, both boys and girls are less involved than in 1983.

Other activities that support school sports include cheerleading and pep clubs. Cheerleading generally involves a small and select group of students drawn through a competitive process, and understandably only 4.6% of students report they are involved in this activity. Pep clubs, while generally less exclusive, currently draw involvement from 4.7%, down from 12% in 1983. Both cheerleading and pep clubs involve participation from more girls than boys.

About four in ten (43%) students believe that athletic success is more highly regarded in their school than academic achievement. This attitude is stronger among those students who rated their schools average or below average; over 60% of those who rated their schools a *D* or *F* thought sports are more highly regarded. One might hypothesize that highly rated schools reward and reinforce classroom success to an equal or greater degree than they celebrate athletic accomplishments.

Music

Although sports are the most popular type of school activity, organized music pursuits also engage a large number of today's students. The second most frequently mentioned cocurricular activity was membership in a school band or orchestra. Approximately a fifth of all students said they played in school bands or orchestras; another 16% are in school choirs or choral groups. Unlike sports, the proportion of students involved in music is as strong today as in 1983.

Choral music activities are primarily the province of female students; nearly a quarter of girls reported singing in school choirs compared with only 9% of boys. Instrumental music, while not as dominated by female students, also has higher participation among girls than among boys.

SCHOOL-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Activities	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Athletic teams/clubs	42.4	48.4	36.8
2. Band/orchestra	19.4	16.4	22.5
3. Choir/choral groups	15.9	9.0	22.5
4. Honor societies	15.9	12.7	19.1
5. Service/volunteer groups	11.9	7.4	16.2
6. Language clubs	11.2	8.3	14.1
7. Drama/theater	10.7	7.2	14.1
8. Student council/government	9.9	8.1	11.8
9. School publications	9.7	5.7	13.7
10. Career-oriented clubs	6.7	3.9	9.0
11. Tutor	5.2	4.4	5.9
12. Debate/speech	5.0	3.7	6.3
13. Pep club	4.7	3.3	6.1
14. Cheerleading	4.6	0.7	8.4
15. Science clubs	4.2	4.2	4.2
16. Teen institute	1.3	0.7	1.9
17. None/no answer	26.1	30.9	21.4

Academic and Service Clubs

Students report participating in a variety of school clubs and organizations. About 16% of students belong to honor societies including the National Honor Society. Volunteer and service organizations draw participation from 12%. Language clubs, drama/theater, student government and school publications each draw participation from 10% to 11% of the student population. Student involvement in career-oriented clubs has dropped significantly, from 15% in 1983 to only 7% today.

School activities with a more academic orientation such as debate/speech teams, tutoring programs and science clubs draw significantly fewer students. Only 4% of the students were members of science clubs and only 5% each were in tutoring and debate and speech groups.

Overall, female students appear more involved in academic and service clubs than male students. With the exceptions of sports and science clubs, girls report greater involvement in school activities than boys. Girls dominate traditionally female activities, such as cheerleading, pep clubs and drama, as well as other activities, e.g., student councils, debate teams and school publications.

Across the board, students believe that involvement in school activities does not detract from academic success. However, students from households earning less than $25,000 a year are more likely than others to consider school activities a problem; nearly a third agree that school activities detract from academic success.

Student Government

Today's students, like those of 1983, view student councils as having only moderate impact on school life. Less than half (43%) agree that their student council "affects decisions about cocurricular activities." A little over half of the students (53%) thought that their student council "communicates student views to administration."

Most students also doubted the student governments' ability to "affect decisions about school rules"; only 35% expressed confidence in the student councils' ability in this area. Supporting the idea that many students consider student councils a "figurehead government" is the fact that 46% believe "only the popular students are on my school's student council."

Although sports are the most popular type of school activity, organized music pursuits also engage a large number of today's students.

After School

The "Multimedia" Generation

After students have filled the requirements for time at school, studying, school activities and sleeping, they have about 60 hours a week of "spare" time. They fill this time with a variety of activities including work, volunteer activities and, increasingly, activities stemming from various electronic media. While music and television are ever popular pastimes, activities like "surfing the Internet" are new to the arena. With all these other activities to distract them, fewer of today's teenagers are reading for enjoyment than in past decades. Additionally, today's students are less supportive of holding down after-school jobs and less involved in public service than in the past.

While music and television are ever popular pastimes, activities like "surfing the Internet" are new to the arena.

Leisure Activities

Students participate in a wide variety of activities after school. Those activities are increasingly audiovisually oriented, with music the perennial front-runner. Students report increasing involvement with television and radio, and computer usage is on the rise, accompanied by usage of on-line services, a newly emerging preoccupation.

Music

As with previous generations, music plays a significant role in the lives of today's youth. Music ranks as their number one non-school activity; 87% of students state that they listen to music after school. Further, music is cited as their top hobby; two thirds (68%) of students mention music as a hobby or special interest. Girls express greater interest in music than boys, with higher proportions listening to music and considering music a hobby.

Nearly nine in ten students (88%) involved in music consider it an important part of their lives.

As expected, new kinds of music continue to appear on the scene and to gain popularity among youth. Rap music, unheard of in 1983, commands the interest of a substantial segment of the student population. Rock music is still the reigning style of music listened to, but it has splintered into two formats. The leading form of rock, "alternative rock," commands the interest of 58% of students while "rock" follows at 49%. Pop is the fourth most popular type of music among students with 41% of the listening audience. About a third of students listen to "oldies" (34%) and a third to "country and western" (31%).

NON-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

Activities	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Listening to music	87.4	83.2	91.6
2. Spending time with friends	82.2	78.8	85.7
3. Watching television/videos	81.9	84.0	79.8
4. Hobbies	57.9	62.4	53.6
5. Playing video games	48.9	68.3	30.3
6. Going to movies	45.4	40.7	50.0
7. Shopping	44.7	23.9	64.7
8. Sports/fitness activities	43.2	52.1	34.9
9. Using personal computers	40.6	46.4	35.3
10. Reading for enjoyment	40.3	26.0	54.0
11. Working	39.0	43.1	35.1
12. Participating in church/religious group	33.2	27.4	38.7
13. Watching sports activities in person	30.9	35.4	26.7
14. Playing a musical instrument	22.6	21.9	23.5
15. Exploring the Internet/on-line services	14.1	15.5	12.8
16. Participating in clubs	12.5	14.4	10.7
17. Volunteering	11.9	7.7	16.0

The amount of time spent watching television contrasts sharply with the less than one hour per day that students spend on homework.

Although "new age" music hit the 1980s scene as second in popularity next to rock, interest in new age has dropped substantially with only 16% reporting that they listen to it today. Punk and disco were among the top six types of music in 1983 but did not even make the list of today's popular formats.

Tastes in music vary significantly based on gender, age, geographic region and ethnicity. Girls are more likely than boys to report listening to pop, oldies, R & B/blues, new age and soul. On the other hand, boys are stronger supporters of heavy metal. Older teens appear to have more diverse tastes than younger teens. More older students report listening to a wider variety of music types, including classic rock, heavy metal, classical and new age music.

Students living in the South have a stronger preference for soul than those in other areas, but are less likely than those in the Northeast and North Central areas to listen to alternative rock or pop. Northeasterners are the least likely to listen to country and western music.

Black students have a stronger listening preference for rap, R & B/blues, soul and jazz, while white students lean more heavily toward alternative rock, oldies, country and western, classic rock, heavy metal and new age music.

TYPES OF MUSIC

Music	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Alternative rock	58.2	55.4	61.1
2. Rock	49.3	51.2	47.5
3. Rap	44.3	42.9	45.6
4. Pop	41.0	30.9	50.8
5. Oldies	33.7	26.5	40.3
6. Country and western	31.2	29.1	32.6
7. Classic rock	28.3	29.3	26.9
8. R & B/blues	26.3	22.1	30.3
9. Heavy metal	23.9	28.4	19.5
10. Classical	17.6	15.5	19.5
11. New age	15.8	13.1	18.3
12. Soul	15.8	13.1	18.3
13. Jazz	10.6	11.2	9.7
14. Folk	2.6	2.4	2.5

Television, Radio and the Movies

Although new technologies such as computers and video games have captured the attention of today's youth, traditional entertainment such as television, radio and movies/videos still claim the attention of more teenagers. Watching television and videos nearly ties with spending time with friends as the second most frequent non-school activity; 82% of students claim that television and videos help fill their leisure time. Forty-five percent of students list movies as a pastime.

The amount of time spent watching television contrasts sharply with the less than 1 hour per day that students spend on homework. Today, the average student watches approximately 4 hours of television per weekday and 4.8 hours per day on the weekend. Only 21% report spending 1 hour or less watching television on weekdays. Overall, television watching captures a greater proportion of student's time than the 3 hours a day reported in 1983.

Some variation in television watching habits is apparent. Younger teens spend more time in front of the television than older teens, both on weekdays and weekends. On the weekends, boys watch more television than girls, possibly due to sports programming. Students in the West report watching less weekday television than those in other regions. In addition, those living in households earning an annual income under $25,000 watch more television (both weekday and weekend) overall, and black students report watching more television than white students.

Major network television is the programming of choice for 88% of all students. Nearly half (46%) watch MTV/VH1, but girls select this programming more than boys (50% vs. 41%). On the other hand, boys are more interested in watching cable sports networks than girls (42% vs. 14%). Cable educational networks, PBS, cable news networks and other cable networks draw substantially fewer viewers.

Students listen to the radio 3.6 hours per day on weekdays and 4.3 hours per day on weekends. Girls listen to the radio more than boys, and older teens report more weekend radio listening than younger teens. Radio listening in combination with television viewing consumes approximately 7.5 to 9 hours a day, as much or more than school and homework combined.

When listening to the radio, teenagers primarily listen only to music (79%). About one in five (18%) listen to a combination of music and news/talk shows.

Students rated sports/fitness, reading, music, art, photography and even sewing among activities higher in importance than video games.

Computers and Video Games

Computer usage and "surfing the Internet" have surged among students since 1983. Computer usage is now cited as a hobby by 47% of students, and the Internet/on-line services (15%) were not even mentioned in 1983. On the other hand, video game usage, while relatively high, has remained at the same level as in 1983 with approximately half of students claiming it as a hobby.

Similar to past findings, more boys than girls claim to use computers and video games during their leisure time or as a hobby. A larger proportion of younger teens report using computers and playing video games as pastimes; however, the Internet/on-line services generate similar usage from both younger and older teens. Interestingly, computer usage is positively related to family income, while video games are not.

While video games attract about half of students as a leisure pursuit, they appear to be primarily an entertaining distraction. When asked to rate hobbies in term of importance, teenagers rated video games at the bottom (52%). This contrasts sharply with 89% rating computers important. Students rated sports/fitness, reading, music, art, photography and even sewing among activities higher in importance than video games.

HOBBIES AND SPECIAL INTERESTS

Hobbies and Interests	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Music	67.5	62.8	72.3
2. Sports/fitness	61.2	69.4	53.4
3. Movies	57.2	52.5	61.8
4. Video games	48.7	70.2	28.2
5. Computers	46.8	52.7	41.0
6. Reading	43.3	30.0	56.1
7. Cooking and baking	32.4	19.3	45.0
8. Art	32.1	30.6	33.4
9. Dancing	16.3	4.8	27.3
10. Internet/on-line services	15.0	17.9	12.4
11. Photography	11.9	6.6	17.2
12. Sewing/crocheting	7.8	2.6	12.6

IMPORTANCE OF HOBBIES AND SPECIAL INTERESTS

(Among those involved)

Hobbies and Interests	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Sports/fitness	97.5	97.8	97.2
2. Reading	92.7	90.2	93.9
3. Computers	89.0	90.4	87.2
4. Music	88.1	86.9	89.1
5. Art	84.9	82.0	87.3
6. Photography	80.4	83.3	79.3
7. Dancing	79.7	85.0	79.5
8. Internet/on-line services	78.4	81.5	74.1
9. Cooking and baking	76.2	73.3	77.1
10. Movies	71.3	74.0	69.3
11. Sewing/crocheting	69.4	33.3	76.3
12. Video games	52.4	56.5	42.5

Sports

Sports are clearly an important part of school life, and they remain an interest among students after hours. Over 40% claim involvement with sports/fitness activities outside of school, 31% attend live sports events, and sports/fitness is considered a hobby by six in ten students (61%). Boys are more likely than girls to participate in sports activities, consider sports a

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SPORTS REGULARLY LISTENED TO OR WATCHED

Sports	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Football	57.8	70.9	45.2
2. Basketball	51.7	59.7	44.3
3. Baseball	40.9	50.5	31.7
4. Hockey	24.3	31.9	17.0
5. Wrestling	19.1	27.8	10.5
6. Auto racing	16.8	26.7	7.4
7. Volleyball/beach volleyball	15.6	10.9	20.0
8. Boxing	14.4	24.1	4.8
9. Soccer	14.1	15.8	12.4
10. Track and field	11.5	9.8	13.2
11. Tennis	10.7	12.5	9.0
12. Softball	9.5	4.4	14.5
13. Golf	6.4	10.1	2.9
14. Bowling	5.9	8.1	3.8
15. Equestrian/horse racing	3.3	2.2	4.4
16. None	15.4	7.9	22.5

hobby or attend live sporting events. In addition, participation rates in sports activities are higher among younger teens.

Those students involved in sports activities overwhelmingly rated sports as important. In fact, a higher percentage of involved students rated sports important (98%) than any other hobby or special interest. Both boys and girls rate sports as tops in importance as a leisure activity.

Relative to 1983, fewer students report listening to or watching sports events today (85% vs. 94%); this is due primarily to a significant drop in interest from girls (78% watching/listening vs. 93% in 1983). While the favorite sports pastime continues to be football, it has declined in popularity. Only 58% of today's students claim to listen to or watch football, compared with 79% in 1983. The popularity of football is lower among girls than among boys; however, girls are as likely to watch basketball as football.

Consistent with the overall drop in sports viewership, fewer students today watch or listen to every sport mentioned in the survey, with the exception of hockey. Hockey is the only sport that has increased its share of the teen audience relative to 1983.

Reading

While students are watching television and listening to the radio more, fewer mention reading as a leisure time interest. In 1983, reading was the second most frequently mentioned pastime, with 49% claiming it as a hobby or special interest. Currently only 43% of students claim reading as a hobby or special interest. In addition to fewer students reading for pleasure, the amount of time spent reading has apparently declined. Today's students claim they spend an average of 3 hours 37 minutes per week reading for enjoyment; this includes reading books, newspapers and magazines. In 1983, books alone accounted for 2 hours 20 minutes of pleasure reading per week.

Those involved in reading rated it high in terms of importance. Reading is second only to sports in terms of its perceived importance.

Reading continues to be far more popular among girls than among boys (56% vs. 30%). In addition to more girls reading for pleasure, girls spend more time reading than boys (4.6 vs. 2.6 hours). Younger teens are more likely to read for pleasure than older teens, and they also spend more time reading.

As might be expected, participation in reading appears linked to other academic and co-curricular activities. Students pursuing a college prep curriculum are more likely to read than those pursing a vocational/technical curriculum. Those who rate their schools high (*A/B*) are more likely to read than those at lower quality schools. In addition, reading rates are higher among those who regularly participate in religious activities, perform community services and do not use cigarettes, drugs or alcohol.

Mysteries and horror/thrillers top the list of most popular types of pleasure reading, followed by fantasy and science fiction. Girls are significantly more likely to read mysteries, horror/thrillers and fantasy while more boys read science fiction. Overall, the most popular types of books among boys are sports and science fiction.

While mysteries maintain their role as the number one most read type of book, readership of romantic fiction has plummeted. Today 38% of girls report reading romantic fiction compared to 67% in 1983. The popularity of horror/thrillers has apparently skyrocketed, rising from 2% of all students in 1983 (when it was described as horror/suspense) to 41% of all students. Fantasy was not even treated as a separate type of fiction in 1983.

Only 15% of students read classic literature for pleasure. Less than 15% report reading non-fiction subjects such as history, biography, religious, do-it-yourself or self-help topics.

Mysteries and horror/thrillers top the list of most popular types of pleasure reading, followed by fantasy and science fiction.

TYPES OF BOOKS READ FOR PLEASURE

Book Types	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Mystery/murder	45.1	29.5	60.1
2. Horror/thriller	41.2	29.1	52.9
3. Fantasy	26.7	21.4	31.5
4. Science fiction	26.7	35.7	18.1
5. Sports	24.2	39.6	9.7
6. Romantic fiction	20.5	2.4	37.6
7. Classic literature	15.1	10.5	19.7
8. History	14.0	17.5	10.7
9. Biography	12.8	10.9	14.5
10. Religious/inspirational	12.6	10.1	14.7
11. Do-it-yourself	5.5	7.2	4.0
12. Self-help	4.6	2.4	6.5

Newspaper circulation has steadily declined over the past two decades, and this drop is reflected in the newspaper reading habits of teens. In 1983, 85% of students reported reading a daily newspaper at least once a week, and average readership was more than three days a week. Today, only two thirds of students (65%) read a daily newspaper at least one day a week, and their overall average was nearly two days a week. Weekend newspaper readership is relatively similar to weekday, with 66% of students claiming to read the newspaper at least once over the weekend.

Boys tend to read daily newspapers more often than girls (perhaps to keep abreast of sports) and older students more often than younger students. Those living in the Northeast are the most avid readers, with higher daily newspaper readership than any other region.

Magazines, while read by 80 percent of students, are not quite as popular as in 1983. Girls are more likely to report reading magazines than boys (84% vs. 73%). On average, students spend nearly two hours a week reading magazines.

Working Students

Students today are less supportive of high school students holding jobs than in the past. Only 69% of the students agree that a high school student should have a part-time job, down from an overwhelming 92% in 1983. Further, only half (51%) agree that high school students should work full-time during the summer.

Opinions regarding students working appear related to the time commitments required for a job and the impact on other areas of life. Relative to 1983, more students are concerned with the negative impact of employment on school work (37% vs. 13% in 1983). In addition, they are dramatically more likely to think that jobs interfere with social activities (67% vs. 25%) or with school-related activities (63% vs. 40%). Girls, more than boys, are concerned about a job limiting social activities.

During the past year, over half of students (55%) claim they had a regular part-time or summer job. Thirty-one percent held a job during both the school year and the summer, 14% had a summer job only and 11% worked only during the school year. Similar levels of summer employment were reported in 1974 and 1983.

During the past year, over half of students (55%) claim they had a regular part-time or summer job.

Overall, the most frequently mentioned job held was baby-sitting (42%); not surprisingly, this job was dominated by girls, with 61% claiming to have regular baby-sitting jobs. Younger girls are more likely to work than younger boys, mostly due to their baby-sitting. Conversely and not surprisingly, personal services such as mowing lawns and shoveling snow were mentioned more often by boys (33%) than by girls (9%).

Those who work during the school year average 12.6 hours per week. Younger teens are more likely to report working at personal service jobs such as baby-sitting, mowing lawns, shoveling snow or cleaning houses. Conversely, older teens are more likely to report "real jobs," such as working for a company.

Working at a restaurant or fast food establishment was the most frequently mentioned type of employment with a company; nearly a quarter of students are employed in this type of service. Relative to 1983, more students are working in restaurants/fast food chains. Employment at retail establishments is next most prevalent with 15% working in retail sales and 7% in retail stocking. Newspaper delivery by teens is down from 17% in 1983 to 6% today. Other types of employment mentioned by less than 5% of students include working at an entertainment center or a movie theater or as a lifeguard or camp counselor.

The average summer job consumed about 20 hours per week; less than one in four (24%) students worked more than 30 hours per week. Baby-sitting is the most popular summer job, as it is during the school year, but certain seasonal jobs, such as lawn mowing, camp counselor and lifeguarding are reported more often for summer employment than as a school year job.

Allowances and Spending Money

With the wide interest in an array of leisure activities, students can incur considerable expenses. What expenses are students responsible for, what do they spend on entertainment, clothing and other items, and how do they pay for them?

It appears that obtaining spending money from allowances is on the decline. Currently only four in ten students (39%) claim they receive either a regular allowance or an allowance for completing their chores. In contrast, over half of 1983 students reported receiving an allowance. Furthermore, the size of allowances has not increased since 1983 when the average was about $9 a week. Those who receive a regular allowance report an average weekly allowance of $8.55, while those who must complete chores get an average of $8.08 per week.

It appears that obtaining spending money from allowances is on the decline

Girls and boys receive similar amounts for allowance. Consistent with more activities and expenses, older teens have higher allowances than younger teens. Younger teens are more likely than older teens to have an allowance that is linked to completion of chores.

How are the remaining six in ten students obtaining their spending money? Over half, or a third of all students, report they receive money for whatever they need. The remainder do not receive any type of allowance but may be using the money they earn from working. Those who work during the school year are least likely to receive any type of allowance.

The majority of students spend some of their own money on entertainment, food and clothing. About half allocate their own money for personal care products or savings. Meanwhile, relatively few spend money on insurance or taking care of their siblings.

Overall, students indicate that they spend a substantial amount of their own money. On average, they save or spend a total of $622 of their own money per year. Since less than half receive an allowance, these funds must come from a combination of allowance, earnings from jobs and gifts.

Students report wide disparities in how they spend their money. While only half (49%) claim to put money into savings, the financial obligation for those who save is heavy. Per capita saving among total students is about $163 per year, more than for any other category of spending. As one would expect, older teens report saving more money than younger teens ($211 vs. $82), and college-bound students save more than those who plan to work after high school ($194 vs. $117).

HOW STUDENTS SPEND THEIR OWN MONEY

(% Spending on type of expenditure)

Expenditures	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Entertainment	82.9	84.5	81.3
2. Food	70.0	70.6	69.2
3. Clothing	67.2	59.3	74.3
4. Personal care products	49.0	30.3	64.5
5. Savings	48.6	47.5	49.6
6. Education related expenses	37.4	34.5	39.6
7. Travel/vacation	31.9	30.3	33.3
8. Local transportation	18.8	17.1	20.4
9. Insurance	11.1	12.3	9.7
10. Taking care of younger siblings	10.0	7.8	12.0

Over eight in ten students spend their own money on entertainment, and their average expenses of $98 per year rank third in amount. Boys spend more on entertainment than girls, an average of $119 compared with an average of $77. This difference in expenditures may be related to dating practices or may suggest that boys do more activities that cost money.

Approximately two thirds of students purchase some of their own clothing. Girls spend an average of $119 a year of their own money on clothing, more than boys, who spend approximately $92. Girls also spend nearly twice as much on personal care products as boys do.

While few students pay for insurance, it constitutes a high expense. Not surprisingly, younger students report spending an average of only $2 for insurance while older students spend an average of $102. This suggests that insurance expenses may be related to many parents' requiring driving age students to contribute to auto insurance costs.

Students spend about $67 of their own money on food each year, with older teens spending significantly more than younger teens ($83 vs. $40) and boys more than girls ($76 vs. $58).

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HOW STUDENTS SPEND THEIR OWN MONEY

(Average amount spent among total students)

Expenditures	Total	Males	Females
1. Savings	$163	$193	$133
2. Clothing	108	92	119
3. Entertainment	98	119	77
4. Insurance	68	74	54
5. Food	67	76	58
6. Travel/vacation	39	39	39
7. Local transportation	34	24	42
8. Personal care products	28	19	37
9. Education related expenses	14	10	17
10. Taking care of younger siblings	3	2	5
Total expenditures	$622	$648	$581

Community Service and Non-School Organizations

Many students are also involved in community activities, clubs and volunteer activities. While involvement in volunteer activities has declined, participation in church or religious group activities is comparable with 1983 levels.

Approximately 30% of students claim involvement in volunteer community activities compared with 41% in 1983 and almost half in 1974. A historically noted pattern of more females than males contributing volunteer services continues today. Higher involvement in volunteer activities is also reported among students in private versus public schools, those pursuing a college preparatory curriculum and those with annual household incomes over $50,000. Students living in a nuclear family are more likely to participate in volunteer activities than those in stepfamilies. In addition, students who rate the overall performance of their school high (*A/B*) are more likely to perform volunteer work than those who rate their school lower.

Church-related activities are the leading type of volunteer work; 58% of the students who volunteer are involved in church-affiliated projects. Fund-raising activities involve 28% of volunteers—the same percentage of volunteer students as in 1983.

Relative to the past, higher percentages of volunteers are involved in charities, working with the elderly and environmental/recycling programs. The growth of involvement in recycling programs is consistent with an overall increase in recycling programs across the nation.

Although hospital volunteer work generated the second highest involvement in 1983 (22% of volunteers), today less than half as many students (9%) report volunteering in hospitals. In keeping with previous trends, todays students report very little involvement in volunteer work related to election campaigns. Only 3% of students who indicated they perform some volunteer work said they donated time to elections.

TYPES OF VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES

(Among students indicating involvement)

Activities	% Total	% Males	% Females
1. Church-related	58.1	56.9	58.8
2. Fund-raising	27.8	22.4	31.3
3. Charity volunteer	23.1	20.7	24.4
4. Working with elderly	18.8	12.9	22.5
5. Environment/recycling-related	17.7	15.5	18.8
6. Explorer group	9.7	15.5	5.6
7. Hospital volunteer	9.0	6.0	10.6
8. Election campaigns	3.2	0.9	5.0

Approximately 30% of students claim involvement in volunteer community activities compared with 41% in 1983 and almost half in 1979.

Half of students anticipate that they will volunteer to do community service activities in the next 12 months. A third of students report participation in church/religious groups, a similar proportion to 1983. Girls are more likely to join church groups than boys. Participation in clubs outside of school involves 13% of students. More boys participate in club activities than girls, perhaps due to scouting activities.

Alcohol and Drug Use

A minority of students claim to use cigarettes, drugs or alcohol. In total, 15% of students claim to use any of these products, with claimed usage similar for boys and girls.

Overall, more older students than younger students engage in one or more of these activities (20% vs. 6%). Students living in traditional nuclear families (consisting of both natural parents and siblings) are less likely to use one or more of these products than students who live either with a single parent

CIGARETTES, DRUGS AND ALCOHOL USAGE

Activities	% Total	% Males	% Females
Use any	14.5	12.9	16.4
1. Smoke cigarettes	9.3	8.3	10.1
2. Use beer/wine	8.6	7.2	9.9
3. Use other alcohol	4.9	3.7	6.1
4. Use drugs	3.5	2.8	4.2

or with a stepparent (13% vs. 20% and 19%). Those who regularly attend religious services are also significantly less likely to engage in any of these activities.

Cigarette and beer/wine use are most prevalent with approximately 9% of teens reporting involvement in each of these activities. About 5% of students claim to drink other alcoholic beverages, with use somewhat more prevalent among girls than among boys. Nearly 4% of students claim to use drugs. Not surprisingly, those who use cigarettes, drugs and alcohol are more likely than others to believe that drugs are a normal part of growing up (58% vs. 8%).

These self-reported figures on personal alcohol use are in great contrast to other recent studies that reported high school students cited alcohol use as the top problem among teens today.

The Homefront

Occasional Conflict but Overall Happiness

Some disagreements and conflict between parents and teenagers can be expected in any family and even viewed as normal. The process of growing up, facing the increasing challenges of peer pressure, establishing one's own identity and developing a sense of personal independence must, by nature, cause conflict between parent and child.

Nevertheless, today's teens appear to have fairly happy relationships with their parents. They view their parents' rules, while generally strict, as fair. They also express confidence that their parents are not only interested in their problems and concerns, but also are accessible and understanding.

The nuclear family, while still the norm for a majority of students in this survey, is clearly not experienced by all teenagers. However, this form of family life appears to provide the "happiest" environment for today's teens.

Overall, students report very harmonious relationships with their parents.

Family Composition

A majority (62%) of the surveyed students live in traditional nuclear families consisting of two natural parents. Fourteen percent live in single parent households, while 12% live in a stepfamily. In addition, 11% describe living in an extended family, which might include stepparents and stepsiblings as well as grandparents, other family members or non-related individuals.

Less than a quarter of students in the survey (22%) have no siblings; the majority (61%) have one or two siblings, while 17% have three or more. In terms of birth order, 37% of students surveyed are the oldest child, 19% a middle child and 21% are the youngest in the family.

The majority of students (70%) have one or both parents who are 35 to 44 years of age while 42% have one or both parents over 45 years of age. Only 11% have a parent younger than 35. Those living in stepfamilies are more likely to have younger parents.

Getting Along With Parents

Overall, students report very harmonious relationships with their parents. The overwhelming majority (94%) claim that they are "very happy" or "fairly happy" with their relationship with their mother. Although relationships with fathers are not as strong, 81% consider those relationships to be happy as well.

On the whole, students claim they hold a great deal of respect for their parents. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 signifying "total respect" and 1 meaning "no respect," teens awarded their mothers with an average rating of 3.5 while fathers received a rating of 3.2. Only 1% indicated "no respect" for their mothers, while 8% had such a low regard for their fathers.

Boys rate their relationships with both parents as "happier" than girls do. Boys also indicate having somewhat higher respect for their fathers than do girls. Both genders report the same level of respect for their mothers.

Boys rate their relationships with both parents as "happier" than girls do.

The traditional nuclear family appears to provide the happiest family environment for students. Students living in nuclear families report having a significantly "happier" relationship with their father and having higher respect for their father than those living in any other family situation. In addition, those in nuclear families rated their relationship and respect for their mother higher than those living in stepfamilies. Those students living in single parent families report the worst relationships with their fathers; this is not surprising since the father is the absent parent in 91% of these households.

Students generally report getting along well with their parents. Overall, relationships with fathers appear to be somewhat more difficult than relationships with mothers. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 signifying "no difficulty at all" and 1 meaning "a lot of difficulty," teens rated the difficulty of their relationship with their mothers with an average of 3.2, while relationships with fathers received a rating of 3.0.

Girls report more difficulty getting along with their mothers than boys do. While boys and girls rate the difficulty with fathers similarly, older girls report having more difficult relationships with their fathers than younger girls; older girls may have more difficulty with fathers due to strict dating rules. Again, those teens living in nuclear families report less difficulty getting along with their father than those living in any other family environment.

The stepparent relationship is significantly more difficult than the relationship with natural parents; this relationship is equally difficult for boys and girls of all ages. Relationships with siblings are equally good whether they are real brothers and sisters or stepsiblings. Older teens are more likely than younger teens to complain about the relationships with their brothers and sisters, however. Interestingly, girls report better relationships with stepsisters than with biological sisters.

GETTING ALONG WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

(Among those with a relationship)

Relationship	Total	Males	Females
1. Mother	3.24	3.31	3.16
2. Father	3.03	3.08	2.98
3. Stepbrothers	3.00	3.03	2.91
4. Stepsisters	2.92	2.72	3.06
5. Brothers	2.85	2.92	2.80
6. Sisters	2.75	2.74	2.75
7. Stepfather	2.65	2.75	2.60
8. Stepmother	2.53	2.45	2.57

No difficulty at all 4.0 A lot of difficulty 1.0

Family Communications

Students express a strong confidence in the caring and interest of their parents. The overwhelming majority (89%) believe that parents are "always interested" or "usually interested" in them and their concerns. Further, three quarters express confidence that parents understand their problems and concerns. In addition to being interested and understanding, most teens (91%) considered their parents accessible to discuss problems and concerns.

Mothers continue to serve as the "listening ear" for the majority of teens. Approximately two thirds of students (66%) agreed they can talk to their mothers more easily than to fathers about their personal problems; only 26% stated that fathers were easier to talk to. Although both boys and girls said they can talk to their mothers more easily than to fathers, girls were most likely to rely on mothers (73% girls vs. 57% boys). Conversely, boys were more likely to be comfortable seeking advice from fathers than girls were (35% vs. 17%).

Consistent with the 1983 survey, about four in ten students consider their parents "old-fashioned." Both mothers and fathers are considered equally old-fashioned (40% vs. 43%). While older teens are more likely than younger to consider their mother old-fashioned (43% vs. 36%), there was little difference in this perception of fathers between the younger and older teens.

Students complain less about their parents being "rigid" than being "old-fashioned." Teens are more likely to describe their fathers as "rigid" than their mothers; about a third (34%) agree that their fathers are rigid, compared with 29% ascribing the characteristic to mothers. Both males and females, younger and older teens are consistent in their ratings.

Another long-standing complaint about parents is that they treat their teenage sons and daughters "like children." Over a third of teenagers (37%) — a higher proportion than in 1983 — express this concern about their parents. Not surprisingly, more younger teens agree that they are "treated like a child" than do older teens (44% vs. 32%). This concern, perhaps more than any other, epitomizes the difficulties that the teen years bring to both parents and students. Secondary students are evolving from childhood to adulthood, and parents are often faced with difficult decisions regarding when to deal with their teenage sons and daughters as children, adults or some mix of the two.

Rules and Regulations

The family, like all societal groups, has rules and regulations to promote acceptable behaviour and family harmony, but, unlike other groups, the family is rarely a democracy. Parents generally make the rules and view themselves as keepers of the family value system. How do students view their family rules?

Over 70% of students reported having household rules regarding drinking alcohol, completion of school work, completion of household chores, curfews and smoking. Other areas constrained by rules include activities that affect students' relationships, such as time on the phone, dating, clothing styles/hair and selection of friends. Almost half of parents require students to attend religious services.

AREAS IN WHICH PARENTS HAVE RULES

(Strictness and fairness among those who have a rule)

	% Have Rules	% Rules Are Strict	% Rules Are Fair
1. Drinking alcohol	75.7	94.4	90.8
2. Completion of school work	75.7	87.9	88.4
3. Completion of household chores	71.5	83.1	81.8
4. Curfew	71.1	82.2	77.2
5. Smoking	70.1	93.7	92.4
6. Time on phone	45.6	70.6	65.9
7. Dating	44.5	80.5	74.3
8. Attending religious services	43.6	81.3	89.9
9. Clothing styles/hair	36.8	68.7	82.2
10. Selection of friends	31.7	67.0	74.1
11. Taking care of younger siblings	31.0	72.9	70.9
12. Preparation for career	23.2	77.7	89.2
13. Time on hobbies/sports	22.1	58.3	86.3

The most frequently cited rules are applied equally to girls and boys. However, parents are more likely to regulate girls by rules regarding curfews, time on the phone and dating. Nearly six in ten girls (58%) have rules regarding dating compared with 31% of boys. On the other hand, more boys report being affected by rules regarding career preparation and time spent on hobbies and sports. Family rules appear to effect similar areas of behavior across the board, with few differences among demographic or geographic groups.

Those who have rules generally consider them to be strictly enforced. The most strictly enforced rules relate to drinking and smoking, followed by school and household work responsibilities. Large percentages of students consider most areas of restriction to be strictly enforced.

Boys and girls expressed some differences in perceptions of how strict parents' rules are. More boys report having strict rules governing their preparation for a career, clothing styles/hair and their selection of friends. On the other hand, girls are more likely to perceive parents' rules on dating to be strict.

Despite these strongly enforced rules, the students generally consider the rules "very fair" or "somewhat fair." Students overwhelmingly believe that parents' rules regarding smoking and drinking are fair. Similarly, the vast majority agree about fairness of rules regarding religious services, career preparation, completion of schoolwork and time spent on sports and hobbies. Even traditional areas of teen complaint regarding rules about curfews, dating and selection of friends are viewed as fair by about three quarters of students.

Not surprisingly, girls, who are more likely to have rules about dating and more likely to consider them strictly enforced, are more critical about the fairness of dating rules than boys are. However, 72% still consider those rules "very" or "somewhat" f[illegible]. Girls are also less likely than boys to consider rules about caring for younger siblings "fair" (63% vs. 80%).

The most strictly enforced rules relate to drinking and smoking, followed by school and household work responsibilities.

Domestic Violence and Parental Drug Usage

More than one in ten students (12%) claim that they have witnessed domestic violence in their home. Family composition is a key variable related to observed domestic violence; teens living in nuclear families are much less likely to have witnessed domestic violence in their households than those living in single parent families, stepfamilies or extended families (11% vs. 28%, 33% and 21%, respectively).

Seventeen percent of students report awareness of one or more parents having used drugs. Again, family composition appears related to perceived drug usage. Teens living in nuclear families are much less likely to be aware of their parent(s) using drugs than those living in other types of families.

In addition, those teens who use cigarettes, drugs or alcohol are significantly more likely than others to have witnessed domestic violence in the home or to be aware of their parent(s) using drugs.

The Big Picture

A Mixture of Thoughtfulness and Cynicism

Today's students take a broad and thoughtful view of the problems facing American youth. When asked to name the single worst influence on American youth, their responses show that they are thinking about social and moral issues as well as more visible and easily identified problems.

Today's students are far less likely than 1983 students to focus on drugs and alcohol as their worst influences. Only about one in five name drugs as their current "worst influence"; in contrast, almost half of 1983 students considered drugs to be their worst influence. Alcohol, the second worst influence in 1983, is no longer considered a leading problem among students questioned in this study.

While substance abuse has become a less pre-eminent problem, other issues have risen in importance. Peer pressure is now almost equal to drugs in number of mentions as the worst influence on today's youth, and "sex/poor morals" is tied for third. The prominence of these items may reflect that today's youth are willing to think about the underlying causes of problems such as drugs as well as the behavioral problems themselves.

Crime and gangs are frequently covered by the media and are much-discussed during political campaigns, and today's students agree that these are major problems. Violence and gangs equal sex/poor morals as the third most frequently mentioned "worst influence."

Students are less likely to blame their problems on the media than in the past. Seven percent of 1983 students said that television was their single worst influence, but only 3% of today's students feel that way. Similarly, fewer students are naming music, other mass media or pornography as the worst influence on American youth.

Student assessments of the worst influences facing youth are generally consistent, regardless of their gender, age, income level and where they live. For example, students in rural areas and small towns are as likely as those in large cities to say that gangs are the worst influence on today's youth.

SINGLE WORST INFLUENCE FACING TODAY'S YOUTH

Influences	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Drugs	21.1	22.8	19.5
2. Peer pressure	20.0	19.3	20.8
3. Sex/poor morals	11.9	8.8	15.1
4. Violence	11.9	11.4	12.4
5. Gangs	11.7	13.8	9.7
6. Crime	4.2	3.7	4.6
7. Television	2.9	3.3	2.5
8. Alcohol	2.5	2.0	2.9
9. Parents/elders	2.1	1.3	2.9
10. Political leaders	1.9	2.4	1.5
11. Cigarettes	1.8	2.2	1.5
12. Unemployment	1.4	1.3	1.3
13. Poverty	0.6	0.0	1.3
14. Pornography	0.4	0.9	0.0
15. Music	0.4	0.2	0.6
16. Movies	0.3	0.4	0.2

However, there are a few noteworthy differences. Younger teens and those in single parent families commonly express concern about peer pressure and consider it the single worst influence. Sex/poor morals is frequently mentioned by older students and girls as their single worst influence.

National and World Problems

In 1983, the threat of nuclear disaster and world war were the greatest global issues, while economic problems were paramount on the national scene. These problems have receded in the minds of today's students, and the problems currently facing America are also seen as worldwide problems.

Crime and the decline of moral and social values are considered the leading problems for both America and the world. Almost a quarter of students report that crime/violence is the most important problem facing the nation, while the decline of moral and social values is cited by 15%. Even higher percentages consider these to be the most important world problems.

AIDS and drugs are the next two most frequently cited national problems. Unemployment and inflation were thought to be America's most important problems in 1983, but they have since become almost non-issues. Just 2% of students feel that unemployment is the nation's greatest problem, while less

MOST IMPORTANT PROBLEM FACING AMERICA

Problems	Today	In Year 2000
1. Crime/violence	23.7	15.1
2. Decline of moral and social values	14.5	11.1
3. AIDS	14.2	15.0
4. Drugs	9.3	6.2
5. Environmental pollution/deterioration	3.5	10.0
6. Decline of the family	3.2	3.1
7. U.S. budget	2.8	4.9
8. Government	2.3	3.5
9. National debt	2.3	3.3
10. Unemployment	2.2	4.3
11. Racial discrimination	2.0	1.1
12. Poverty	1.9	2.3
13. Racial tension	1.7	1.0
14. Legal system	1.2	1.1
15. Paroling of criminals	0.9	0.6
16. Inflation	0.7	0.9
17. Terrorism	0.6	1.7
18. Health care	0.5	1.2

Crime and the decline of moral and social values are considered the leading problems for both America and the world.

than 1% cite inflation as the most important problem. The U.S. budget and national debt are now seen as slightly more troublesome than unemployment and inflation, although each is named as the top national problem by less than 3% of students.

Students anticipate that America's problems will change over the next several years. AIDS is expected to rival crime/violence as our leading problem in the year 2000. Problems with environmental pollution/deterioration are also expected to grow and become as great an issue as the decline of moral and social values. Some students expect government and economic problems, including the U.S. budget, national debt or unemployment, to emerge as the country's greatest problem by the year 2000.

The environment, poverty and overpopulation are the third through fifth ranking world problems. Concerns about the world's environment have increased since 1983, perhaps in response to issues such as global warming and the diminishing ozone layer. Poverty and overpopulation are considered the world's greatest problem less often than in 1983. All three of these problems are currently thought to be greater problems for the world than for America.

MOST IMPORTANT CURRENT WORLD PROBLEM

Problems	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Crime	43.3	41.1	45.0
2. Decline of moral and social values	21.2	19.7	22.9
3. Environmental problems	12.4	12.5	12.4
4. Poverty	9.5	6.6	12.4
5. Overpopulation	5.9	7.9	4.0
6. Terrorism	5.8	6.6	5.0
7. Threat of war	4.8	6.3	3.4
8. Inflation/economy	4.6	4.2	5.0
9. Nuclear disaster	3.2	5.5	1.1
10. Energy	0.6	1.1	0.2

Today's students are even less willing than those surveyed in 1983 to place their views on the political spectrum.

The threat of war and nuclear disaster are no longer thought to be among the most pressing global problems. Terrorism now outranks war and nuclear disaster as a serious threat, although only 6% of students consider terrorism to be the world's greatest problem.

Politics and Government

Young people continue to have little faith in government and limited interest in politics. The few signs of improving attitudes that were seen in the 1983 survey have been replaced by a return to the cynicism seen during the years after Watergate.

Government corruption and dishonesty are widespread, according to today's students. Almost 80% agree with this sentiment, a much larger majority than in 1983 when less than two thirds held this opinion and slightly above the nearly three quarters who felt this way in 1974.

A majority of these teenagers also agree that being rich is a necessity to get elected to high office. A similar response was obtained from students in 1974, whereas only 40% of 1983 students said that wealth was an electoral necessity. The 1992 campaign of Ross Perot and recent political successes of other multimillionaires have doubtlessly contributed to the increasing connection between wealth and high office.

Many students question whether *anything* done by the U.S. government is useful. Almost half said that work done by Congress does not benefit U.S. citizens, and only four in ten agree that President Clinton's programs help U.S. citizens.

ATTITUDES TOWARD VOTING AND GOVERNMENT

Agreement	% All	% Males	% Females
1. When I am eligible I intend to vote in most elections	84.2	81.1	87.2
2. Government corruption and dishonesty are widespread	79.4	78.0	81.0
3. Being rich is necessary to get elected to high office	54.6	57.2	52.5
4. Work by Congress does not benefit U.S. citizens	47.2	49.0	45.4
5. I would like to be able to vote for someone who is not a Democrat or a Republican	46.4	49.3	43.8
6. President Clinton's programs help U.S. citizens	39.3	38.6	39.6
7. My vote doesn't matter	35.1	38.4	31.4
8. I am very interested in running for public office	12.4	12.9	11.6

Despite the low voter turnout that has historically been seen among young people, virtually all of today's students claim that they plan to exercise their voting rights. Over 80% agree that they intend to vote in most elections when they are eligible. However, whether these students will be any different than their predecessors once they reach voting age might be doubtful, given their negative views of the political process. The 35% who agree that their vote doesn't matter — more of these are boys than girls — may be especially questionable voters.

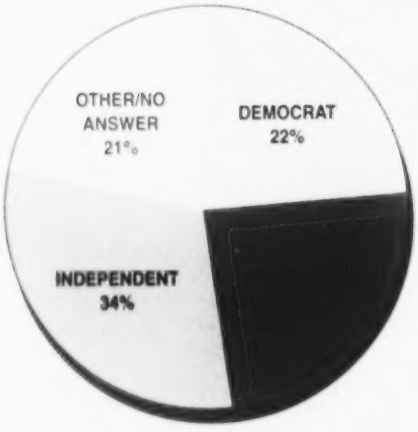
Parties and Labels Rejected

The majority of today's students reject an affiliation with either of the major political parties and do not wish to be labeled as either "liberal" or "conservative."

One third of students say that "independent" best represents their political views — more than describe themselves as either Republican or Democrat. Another 21% describe themselves as "other" or are unwilling to select any one-word representation of their political views.

The 45% of students with a major party affiliation are equally split between Republicans and Democrats. This even division occurs among both boys and girls and across all ages. The gender gap that has been reported for adults, in which women tend to be Democrats while "angry white males" are Republican, is not apparent among these pre-voting-age students.

Label That Best Represent Students' Political Views



Today's students are even less willing than those surveyed in 1983 to place their views on the political spectrum. Almost half, compared with 40% in 1983, say they "don't know" whether liberal, conservative or middle of the road identifies their political views. Another quarter, down from a third in 1983, place themselves squarely in the middle of the road. Only 15% describe themselves as conservative, and 12% consider themselves liberal. These views, like party affiliation, are highly consistent across genders. Younger students are less able to label their views than older students, while older students more often place themselves in the middle of the road or on the conservative side of the political range.

The 1996 Presidential Election

In early 1996, at the time of this survey's administration, no presidential candidate had the strong support of American teens. Just 26% said they would vote for Bill Clinton in the presidential election, and even fewer selected any of his leading potential challengers. Bob Dole was supported by 22% of teens, 11% favored Ross Perot, Pat Buchanan attracted 10%, and Ralph Nader was chosen by just 2%. A sizable 22% preferred some other candidate, and another 8% failed to choose any candidate.

The gender gap that was missing from these students' party affiliations and political views does show up in these hypothetical voting results. Bill Clinton is supported by more girls than boys, while the opposite is true for Bob Dole. Results also differ by age of the teens. Bill Clinton and Bob Dole attract equal numbers of hypothetical votes from younger teens. Support for Dole is weaker among older teens, leaving Bill Clinton with the larger base of support.

Religious Practices

Although its influence may have diminished somewhat over the past decade, religion continues to play a significant role in the lives of most of today's teens.

A sizable percentage of teens remain strongly committed to religion. Over a third, slightly higher than in 1983, feel that religion is "very important" in their life. On the other hand, the percentage who say that religion is unimportant to them has also increased, from a quarter in 1983 to 30% today.

Regular attendance at religious services has decreased over the past decade. Just over half of today's youth report that they regularly attend religious services, down from 63% in 1983. Still, today's youth go to religious services in far greater numbers than in 1974, when only a quarter were regular attendees.

Religion is considered more important by younger teens than by older teens, and younger teens attend church more regularly than older teens. Religion also enjoys strong support among students with three or more siblings, in the South and among black students. Male and female teens are equally likely to attend religious services, but girls report religion to be more important than boys do.

Teens are divided on the need for a strong separation between church and state. Half agreed and half disagreed that it is not at all appropriate for religious institutions to be involved in political matters. However, only a third believe that school prayer should not be permitted.

Teens are divided on the need for a strong separation between church and state.

Heroes

The mistrust that many teens have for politicians may also extend to other public figures. When asked to name their biggest hero today, the leading responses are "no one," cited by 21% of teens, and a parent, named by 16%.

Athletes are more frequently selected as heroes than other public figures — especially by male teens, who more often name an athlete than a parent as their biggest hero. Conversely, girls are more likely than boys to name parents, religious leaders and friends as heroes. Seven percent or fewer name a religious leader, musician, friend, actor or educator as their biggest hero.

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BIGGEST HERO TODAY

Heroes	% All	% Males	% Females
1. No one	21.0	22.8	19.5
2. A parent	16.2	12.9	19.1
3. An athlete	15.0	22.8	7.6
4. A religious leader	6.8	4.4	9.0
5. A musician	6.4	6.3	6.5
6. A friend	5.5	3.3	7.8
7. An actor	4.7	3.5	5.9
8. An educator	3.2	2.4	4.0
9. A business leader	0.7	0.7	0.8
10. A politician	0.3	0.2	0.4
11. A community activist	0.2	0.4	0.0

Views on Contemporary Issues

As in 1983, the views of today's students about contemporary issues contain a mixture of political outlooks. According to traditional labels, their positions are "conservative" on some issues and "liberal" on many others.

Families and Children

Teen opinions on topics related to families and children provide an example of how today's teens can have both "conservative" and "liberal" points of view. While teens strongly disapprove of early parenthood, they don't believe that parents have to fit the traditional mold of a married couple and stay-at-home mom.

Students almost unanimously agree that teenagers are not prepared to have babies. Over 70% agree strongly with this sentiment, and few teens believe they are responsible enough to have a baby. However, three quarters of all teens and an even greater majority of teens in single parent, step and extended families agree that a single parent can raise a family. Only one out of five teens believe that women should not be employed before their children enter school.

Sexual Issues

Students take a more middle-of-the-road approach to issues related to sexual behavior and education. While somewhat over half (61%) agree that condoms should be available in schools, somewhat less than half (40%) think that premarital sex is okay. Teenaged males were no more likely than females to be supportive of premarital sex.

Only a third say that sex education should be done by parents rather than schools, but it's not clear whether the majority would prefer that sex education be handled by schools alone, by both schools and parents or by a third party.

Role of Government

Although teens dislike the political process and the way that government operates, they have an expansive view of the role that government *should* be playing in the lives of Americans. This activist perspective seems more traditionally "liberal" than their stands on other issues, but may be rooted in their youth and idealism. Many of the causes they support may be laudable in theory but not so easy to plan, fund and implement.

Teens express strong support for a national health plan and increased spending on AIDS research; over 80% agree with each of these ideas. The large majority of students also believe that bilingual education should be offered in areas where a high percentage of families are non-English-speaking. Almost 60% subscribe to the statement "The government must provide safe, decent and sanitary housing for all Americans, whatever the cost." These programs (except for AIDS research, which was not presented as a survey issue) were also supported strongly by students in 1983.

Teens express strong support for a national health plan and increased spending on AIDS research.

Teens take an activist but more conservative stand on immigration issues. Over 80% believe that the security along the Mexican border should be increased to keep out illegal immigrants, and two thirds think that legal immigration to the United States should be reduced.

National service is one area in which student activism has its limits. Most teens do not think that national or volunteer service, whether with agencies such as the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps or in their communities, should become a requirement.

Social and Moral Issues

Sexual and moral issues include some of the most controversial subjects among the adult public, and many of these also serve to divide the teen population.

Most notably, teens are torn over the issues of abortion and assisted suicide. About 48% of today's students agree that abortion should remain legal, while 52% disagree. This situation has changed only slightly since 1983, when 52% supported legal abortion while 47% were opposed. A similar division is seen for assisted suicide; 47% would allow an individual to choose assisted suicide, while 53% would not.

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Teens also have mixed feelings about censorship and limits on self-expression. For example, most students disapprove of the "V" chip and the banning of school prayer. On the other hand, over half agree that it is important to control access to information on the Internet. Opinions differ as to whether local school officials should be able to censor school books and materials and whether smokers should have the same rights as non-smokers. Almost half of students would allow censorship of school books/materials and restrictions on smokers' rights.

Today's students have a tolerant view toward homosexuality, at least in terms of how gay men and women should be treated. Over 70% disapprove of discrimination against gay men and lesbians, and the majority (59%) believe that openly gay men and lesbians should be allowed to serve in the military. However, boys are twice as likely as girls to support discrimination against homosexuals (38% vs. 19%). Boys are also evenly split on military service for openly gay men and lesbians, while girls support the notion by a nearly two to one margin.

Today's students recognize that economic security can no longer be taken for granted and may even be beyond the reach of many people.

Students have less sympathy for affirmative action, at least in its present form. A solid majority of 61% agree that affirmative action policies should be changed.

Crime and Justice

Given their belief that crime and violence are the leading national and world problems, it is not surprising to find that teens take mostly "conservative" stands on criminal justice issues. Overwhelming majorities support the death penalty, agree that teenaged criminals should be punished as adults, and feel that the insanity plea is overused by those accused of crimes.

Most teens also express concern about the dangers of domestic terrorism and paroled prisoners. Sixty-five percent agree that our government is not protecting us adequately from domestic terrorism, and 63% think that individuals serving a prison sentence are a greater danger after being paroled.

Although teens' views on crime are generally hard-line, they apparently do not view concealed weapons as a useful deterrent. Only 30% agree that Americans should be allowed to carry concealed weapons, although the notion is supported by more boys (39%) than girls (21%).

Economic Security

Today's students recognize that economic security can no longer be taken for granted and may even be beyond the reach of many people. Still, they remain optimistic about their personal prospects.

Over three quarters of students agree with the statement "Because of changes in the economic condition of the country and the world, young people can no longer take for granted that they will be able to live better than their parents." Agreement with this statement is widespread at all income levels. Similarly, most students (64%) believe that the "American Dream" has become impossible for most people to achieve. The majority of students at all income levels endorse this sentiment, although agreement is strongest among those in households with annual incomes of less than $50,000.

Despite their feelings about the economic conditions in general, the large majority of students believe that they're better off than their parents were at their age and will be better off than their parents in the long run. Students at all income levels share this sentiment.

VIEWS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Agreement	% Strongly Agree	% Total Agree
I. Families and Children		
1. Teenagers are not prepared to have babies	71.0	90.9
2. A single parent can raise a family	40.2	74.5
3. Abortion should remain legal	27.4	47.7
4. I am very likely to raise my children differently than I have been raised	24.9	54.6
5. Premarital sex is OK	14.3	40.1
6. Women should not be employed at all before their children enter school	7.4	20.3
7. I am responsible enough now to raise a baby	5.0	14.3
II. Educational Issues		
1. A bilingual education program should be offered in areas where a high percentage of families are non-English-speaking	35.6	70.5
2. Condoms should be available in schools	33.0	61.1
3. School prayer should not be permitted	17.2	31.6
4. Local school officials should be able to censor the books and materials to be used in their schools	16.8	46.9
5. Sex education should be done by parents, not in schools	14.9	32.4
6. I wouldn't want to go to school with a person with AIDS	7.9	21.4

VIEWS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES (continued)

Agreement	% Strongly Agree	% Total Agree
III. Social Issues		
1. Respect for the National Anthem is important to me	42.1	74.0
2. The "V" chip will unfairly censor what teens can watch on television	36.3	67.0
3. It is important to control access to information on the Internet	26.4	60.0
4. Individuals should be allowed to choose assisted suicide	24.2	47.4
5. Smokers should not have the same rights as non-smokers	20.6	42.5
6. The purchase and use of marijuana should be legalized	13.3	25.1
7. Discrimination against gay men and lesbians is OK	13.1	28.6
8. People are born homosexual	8.9	27.2
IV. Governmental Issues		
1. Our government should increase security along the Mexican border to keep illegal immigrants out of the country	54.7	83.5
2. Government spending on AIDS research should be increased	48.1	83.3
3. Adequate health care for all should be provided through a national health plan	47.7	81.4
4. Legal immigration to the United States should be reduced	37.7	67.3
5. The government must provide safe, decent and sanitary housing for all Americans, whatever the cost	24.6	58.8
6. It is not at all appropriate for religious institutions to be involved in political matters	21.1	51.1
7. Burning the U.S. flag is OK	5.4	10.7
V. Crime and Justice		
1. The insanity plea is used too much by those accused of crimes	56.8	89.7
2. The death penalty is an acceptable form of punishment for some crimes	55.0	81.1
3. Teenagers who commit crimes should be punished as adults	44.4	82.7
4. Our government is not protecting us from domestic terrorism, such as the Oklahoma City bombing	27.6	64.9
5. Individuals serving a prison sentence are a greater danger to me after being paroled	23.5	62.7
6. I believe Americans should be allowed to carry concealed weapons if they choose to do so	12.9	29.7
7. Our legal system is the best it can be	2.2	12.6

VIEWS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES (continued)

Agreement	% Strongly Agree	% Total Agree
VI. Economic Security		
1. I'm better off than my parents were at my age	37.1	72.4
2. Young people can no longer take for granted that they will be able to live better than their parents	31.6	78.2
3. The "American Dream" has become impossible for most people to achieve	23.3	63.8
4. In the long run, I think I will be better off than my parents have been	22.7	70.2
5. If people are unable to find jobs, it is their own fault	12.9	40.5
VII. Military and Service Issues		
1. Openly gay men and lesbians should be allowed to serve in the military	32.4	58.5
2. Americans should be required to volunteer for service in their communities	17.0	43.5
3. National service with agencies such as the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps should be mandatory	6.3	31.5

Hopes and Dreams for the Future

A Mixture of Optimism and Realism

What do current secondary school students plan to do once their high school years are behind them? Although the large majority plan to get more schooling, getting a job is becoming an additional option for an increasing number of teens.

Three fifths of today's students plan to attend a four-year college or university after high school, slightly above the 54% who planned to do so in 1983 and far higher than the 33% in 1974. However, there has been an even greater increase in plans to get a job after high school: from 37% in 1983 to 47% in 1996.

More travel also seems to be in the forecast for today's youth. The percentage of students who plan to travel immediately after high school has almost doubled, from slightly over 9% in 1983 to 17% today. There has been little change in other educational plans and in plans to get married, or in plans to join the armed forces.

Getting a job and pursing an education are not mutually exclusive goals in the minds of today's youth. Over half of those students who plan to get a job immediately after high school also plan to attend a four-year college or university.

Attending a four-year college is in the immediate plans of more girls than boys, while boys are more likely than girls to be intending to get a job, attend a training/vocational school or join the armed forces. Younger and older teens have similar plans after high school.

IMMEDIATE PLANS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Plans	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Four-year college/university	60.6	53.8	67.0
2. Get a job	46.7	49.5	43.7
3. Travel	17.0	15.8	18.1
4. Get married	15.2	14.7	15.5
5. Two-year college/university	14.7	14.2	14.7
6. Training/vocational school	13.0	16.0	9.9
7. Join armed forces	9.6	15.8	3.6
8. Join volunteer organization	3.6	2.2	4.8

over half of those students who plan to get a job immediately after high school also plan to attend a four-year college or university.

Those teens who plan to seek further education are primarily motivated by the desire for a concrete improvement in their lives or skills. They're most likely to see further education as a mechanism to getting a good job. Other common motivations are independence, obtaining the ability to make a difference in life and widening their options. Obtaining a good job is more motivating to boys than to girls, while girls are more interested than boys in independence and making a difference or changing things for the better.

Career Interests

There has been relatively little change in the career interests of teens since 1983. Most of the top career choices continue to be traditional ones such as being a doctor, teaching, business or engineering. One surprising development has occurred in the field of computers. Computer-related careers were the leading choice of 1983 teens, but today's teens see this field as just one of many career options. As teens become more knowledgeable about computers they may be beginning to think of computers as a tool that can be used in many professions rather than as an end in itself.

Law enforcement, the military, writing and child care are career choices that have risen in popularity since 1983, while interest in accounting has dwindled.

Career interests by gender seem to be shifting for many professional and managerial occupations and in the arts. Medical careers other than nursing are currently held mostly by males, but today's teenaged girls are far more interested than boys in pursing a career as a doctor, veterinarian, psychologist or other medical worker. Girls are likewise more interested than boys in the field of law and are almost equally interested in business. On the other hand, a career in music was mostly of interest to girls in 1983 but now attracts equal numbers of boys and girls. Boys and girls are also equally interested in pursuing a career in art.

Many of the other career interests of todays teens reflect traditional gender differences. Female-dominated occupations, such as teaching, nursing, cosmetology and child care, still attract far more girls than boys. Meanwhile boys remain much more interested than girls in occupations requiring technical and physical skills, such as engineering, computer software development, professional sports, military service, law enforcement, architecture, construction, mechanical work and mathematics.

CAREERS THAT STUDENTS ARE INTERESTED IN PURSUING

Careers	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Medical doctor	6.5	5.3	7.8
2. Teaching	6.2	3.1	9.2
3. Business	6.1	6.8	5.5
4. Engineering	5.2	9.8	0.8
5. Veterinarian	4.9	2.6	7.1
6. Computer software development	4.3	7.0	1.7
7. Miscellaneous medical	4.2	1.5	6.7
8. Music	3.7	4.2	3.4
9. Law	3.4	1.8	5.0
10. Nursing	3.4	0.2	6.5
11. Military service	3.3	5.9	0.8
12. Psychology	3.2	1.8	4.6
13. Professional sports	3.1	6.1	0.2
14. Law enforcement	3.1	4.8	1.5
15. Art	3.0	3.1	2.7
16. Architecture	2.6	4.4	0.8
17. Cosmetology	2.6	0.2	4.8
18. Writing	2.3	1.5	3.2
19. Construction trades	2.2	4.6	0.0
20. Wife/mother	2.1	0.2	4.0
21. Mechanic	2.1	4.4	0.0
22. Child care	2.0	0.7	3.4
23. Communications/media	2.0	1.5	2.5
24. Accounting	1.9	1.3	2.5
25. Acting/theater	1.6	1.1	2.1
26. Mathematics	1.5	2.6	0.4

Most of the top career choices continue to be traditional ones such as medicine, teaching, business or engineering.

Girls continue to have lower salary expectations than boys, but the gender gap is decreasing. In 1983 girls expected to earn an average of 21% less than boys when beginning their career; their shortfall in expected earning has now decreased to 11%. The remaining gender difference in salary expectations is mainly due to a greater number of boys with very high expectations. Boys are more likely than girls to expect to make at least $50,000 when they start their career.

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Older students have somewhat more realistic career objectives than younger students. Those in grades 7-9 show interest in being a veterinarian, professional athlete or actor/actress in numbers far greater than the jobs available in these fields. In contrast, the largest number of students in grades 10-12 select business as their career interest.

Life Goals

The 1983 students felt that career success was their most important life goal. This focus on work has given way to a broader perspective on life among 1990s teens.

Older teens feel that personal development and satisfaction is second only to work/career in importance.

A successful career is *not* the ultimate life goal of today's students. Less than 10% indicate that career success is the one thing that they want out of life — a huge difference from 1983, when more students said they wanted career success than anything else. The largest number of teens now feel that personal fulfillment leading to happiness or a long, enjoyable life is their most important goal. Marriage/family, religious satisfaction and love are other personal goals that are paramount for substantial numbers of students.

THE ONE THING STUDENTS WANT OUT OF LIFE

Items	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Happiness	27.7	22.8	32.4
2. Long/enjoyable life	15.9	18.4	13.7
3. Marriage/family	9.3	7.7	10.9
4. Financial success	7.8	10.5	5.3
5. Career success	7.6	9.4	5.9
6. Religious satisfaction	7.5	7.4	7.4
7. Love	6.5	5.9	6.9
8. Personal success	5.7	6.1	5.3
9. Personal contribution to society	2.2	2.6	1.9
10. Friends	1.9	2.8	1.1
11. Health	1.7	1.5	1.9
12. Education	1.6	1.1	2.1

However, it would be wrong to conclude that having a successful career is unimportant to today's students. Teens overwhelmingly feel that work and career are very important for their own personal success. Work and career are considered more important success factors than personal development and satisfaction, friendships or immediate family. Family is now thought to play less of a role in personal success than in 1983, when it ranked second behind work and career as an important success factor.

VERY IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR OWN PERSONAL SUCCESS

Factors	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Work and career	78.0	79.1	76.7
2. Personal development and satisfaction	62.7	55.4	69.3
3. Friendships	62.7	59.2	65.9
4. Immediate family	59.3	57.0	61.5
5. Religious/spiritual activities	40.1	36.8	43.0
6. Extended family	27.1	24.4	29.3
7. Social influence	21.7	19.0	24.0

Both girls and boys consider work and career to be very important, but when forced to prioritize, girls are especially likely to focus on happiness as their primary life goal. More girls than boys also consider personal development and satisfaction to be very important. Boys are more likely than girls to choose financial or career success as the one thing they want out of life, although happiness remains the top life priority of the largest number of boys.

Perceived success factors also differ by age. Older teens feel that personal development and satisfaction is second only to work and career in importance. This factor is not quite as important to younger teens, who think that social influences are fairly important. This is another indication that peer and social pressures have their greatest impact on these younger students.

Students generally recognize that they will have to make some sacrifices to achieve their life objectives. They most often anticipate that they will need to give up some of their free time, spare-time activities and money. The next most frequently mentioned sacrifices are social activities and self-centeredness.

Interestingly, girls are more likely than boys to feel they won't need to make any sacrifices to achieve their objectives. This could be due to their strong prioritization of happiness over career and money as their primary life objective. It's also possible that their expectations are unrealistic. The image of "superwoman" — the woman who can simultaneously have a successful career, marriage and children — may be perceived as a completely achievable goal among these teenaged girls.

Wedding Bells and Children

Marriage and children continue to be endorsed by students, but today's students expect to marry later and to have fewer children than students in 1983.

On average, students feel that the mid-twenties is the ideal age for marriage, a change from 1983 when 22 or 23 was thought to be the best age. The majority of boys now think that an age 25 or older is ideal, whereas girls are slightly more likely to prefer an age under 25 for marriage. Very few boys or girls believe that marriage before the age of 20 is desirable; such marriages are considered more likely to end in divorce than marriages between older people.

THE IDEAL AGE FOR MARRIAGE

Age	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Less than 20	4.5	3.7	5.2
2. 20-24 years	43.9	39.8	47.8
3. 25-29 years	43.4	47.4	39.7
4. 30 years or older	8.3	9.2	7.2
Average age (years)	24.4	24.7	24.1

Todays students overwhelmingly want to have children — only one out of ten rejects the idea — but they want fewer children than the 1983 students did. Girls want an average of 2.3 children, down from 2.5 in 1983. Boys want an average of 2.1 children, compared with 2.3 in 1983. Although both boys and girls are likely to choose two children as the ideal number, more girls than boys want large households with four or more children.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WOULD LIKE TO HAVE

Number	% All	% Males	% Females
1. None	9.2	8.1	10.1
2. One	10.8	11.1	10.5
3. Two	51.5	55.3	48.0
4. Three	16.0	16.5	15.7
5. Four or more	12.4	9.0	15.7
Average number of children	2.2	2.1	2.3

DIFFERENCES IN RAISING CHILDREN

Areas of Difference	% All	% Males	% Females
1. Provide more freedom	39.9	37.6	42.2
2. Be more understanding	38.2	35.9	40.5
3. Be less "old-fashioned"	36.7	36.8	36.8
4. Be more trusting	35.7	32.6	38.9
5. Talk more	32.7	25.2	39.9
6. Be less strict	30.4	28.2	32.6
7. Be more encouraging	29.5	26.5	32.6
8. Give more responsibility to child	26.3	26.0	26.7
9. Let them know I care	25.7	23.4	27.9
10. Create better emotional climate	22.8	19.0	26.5
11. Provide more guidance	19.8	17.7	21.8
12. No differences	9.1	10.1	7.6

Interestingly, teens who currently have several siblings tend to want more children than those with one or two siblings. Large families may be a challenge for parents, but their children apparently do not view the experience as a negative one.

Students expect to change some of their parents' practices when they raise their own children, but no single practice stands out as the greatest area of expected difference. Students most commonly believe that they would provide more freedom, be more understanding, be less "old-fashioned," be more trusting and talk more than their parents. Girls expect to differ from their parents in more ways than boys and are especially likely to intend to talk more with their children.

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